

THE INDEPENDENT

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Young Britain. The truth. Starts today



Today we begin a one-week series reporting the biggest survey ever conducted of Britain's young people. Contrary to the popular image of a drug-dazed and sex-crazed 'yoof', the survey finds that young Britons are more serious-minded, hard-working and responsible than any generation since the 1950s. Nicole Yeash and Jack O'Sullivan study the results - exclusively in *The Independent*, every day this week.

The startling new research paints a portrait of a responsible generation trying to build a life on endeavour, destroying the image of youth as ill-educated ravers and state spongers.

Although they have taken on some characteristics of Thatcherism, many remain worried about the disintegration of the Welfare State and the insecure job market. More than 10,000 young people, aged between 12-25, were asked for their views on work, education and society during the two-year programme.

Jo Gardiner, director of the Industrial Society's 2020 Vision survey, said: "We want to give young people the chance to speak up and speak out."

"They set the agenda, they identified the subjects and they are going to take this research and push for change."

The survey shows a startling picture of an optimistic, can-do generation who want

to better themselves through education, while learning practical skills.

They are striving for traditional roots by seeking stability through marriage and family, once declared unfashionable by

youth generations of the Sixties and Seventies. And they say parents who provide material goods at the expense of time with their children amounts to neglect.

Women come out on top as best prepared for the new world, while environmental concerns - seen by many as the domain of youth - take a back seat to social problems closer to home.

Even though young Britons are in favour of traditional institutions, they are paradoxically one of the most liberal generations, dedicated to individual rights, including the de-criminalisation of soft drugs and preventative measures against crime as opposed to punitive crackdowns.

Anti-racism and feminist ideals feature

high on the agenda for both sexes. And the majority of men and women believe child care should be shared between parents.

A new political landscape also emerges distinct from Westminster, which is generally regarded as a turn off. The majority are only interested in issues close to home, choosing to ignore national and international affairs.

More than 40 per cent said they have had no involvement in any political activity in the last three years.

Surprisingly, the enduring image of young people enjoying frequent casual sex is blown away. The survey shows that the vast majority are looking for a long-term, stable relationship.

TODAY

Young people aspire to job security, marriage and stability. That's why they are feeling the pressure.

TOMORROW

How tomorrow's people reject swinging sex. And how young women plan to run the country.

TODAY'S NEWS

US attack on Iraq may be delayed

The US pressed on with its build-up of military force in the Gulf yesterday sending the aircraft carrier USS George Washington through the Suez Canal. But there were signs that Washington may have to put a military strike against Saddam Hussein on hold, after failing to win the support of its old Gulf War allies. With only Britain so far showing any sign of committing itself, France confined itself to a verbal condemnation of Baghdad. On a whistle-stop tour of the Middle East, Madeleine Albright, the US Secretary of State, failed to persuade even Kuwait, which Iraq invaded in 1990, to support the use of force in the stand-off. Page 5

CD-Rom robbers

Stealing from banks is no longer the top pursuit for armed robbers; the new target is stores of CD-Roms. Microsoft have just been hit by a heist of their Christmas stock that could cost the company £30m. Page 7

Budget windfall

The Government is £1bn better off than it thought, because of the sharper than expected fall in unemployment. Diane Coyle, our Economics Editor, expects the spare cash may be used to bolster the NHS this winter, and cut government borrowing. Page 6

Oxbridge billions

The wealthiest Oxbridge colleges have greater assets than some of Britain's best-known listed companies, and an income to match. So why do the two elite universities protest that they would have to charge top up fees if the Government stopped subsidies? Page 10

Blair: 'I think I'm a pretty straight sort of guy'

Tony Blair placed his personal reputation on the line yesterday. In an appeal for the public to trust him over the Formula One donations scandal, he put on a polished performance. But, *Frank Abrams* writes, the matter is unlikely to rest there.

In line with the new tradition of political apologies, the Prime Minister went on television yesterday to say "sorry" to the British public. The issue of Bernie Ecclestone's £1m donation to Labour and his sport's subsequent exemption from a tobacco sponsorship ban had been badly handled, he admitted.

Speaking on BBC1's *On the Record* programme, Mr Blair put up a strong defence against any suggestions of impropriety, saying he had been "hurt and upset" by much that had been written about him.

"I think most people who have dealt with me think I am a pretty straight sort of guy, and I am," he said.

"I am sorry about this issue. I should have realised it was going to blow up into this type of importance, but I have honestly done what I thought was best for the country... I would never, ever, do something wrong or improper or change a policy because someone supported or donated money to the party. I didn't in this case."

Mr Blair described suggestions in yesterday's newspapers that donations by Lord Sainsbury had affected planning decisions on supermarkets as "completely ridiculous". The decisions had been made by planning inspectors. "David Sainsbury is getting absolutely pilloried because he is a supporter of the Labour Party," he said.

The Prime Minister's strong performance included a hint that he might be prepared to limit all political donations to £5,000 if Sir Patrick Neill, the public stan-



Public appearance: Tony Blair before he apologised on TV yesterday

dards watchdog who is to investigate the issues, recommended it.

He also promised to publish all donations over £5,000 going back to 1992 if the other parties would do the same. Labour has published all such donations since 1995, and the Liberal Democrats have resolved to do so from January 1998, but the Tories have always kept their funding secret.

Mr Blair confirmed he was aware of Mr Ecclestone's pre-election donation when the men and their aides met on 16 October. He said he also believed the Formula One boss had made a firm commitment to a further payment - something Mr Ecclestone has denied. But he saw no reason not to see Mr Ecclestone. It would have been "bizarre" not to treat a party donor with the same respect accorded to others. The Italian Prime Minister and Chancel-

lor Kohl of Germany had also seen the sport's representatives to argue against a European ban on tobacco sponsorship.

However, the Prime Minister did not fully quell suspicion surrounding his motives in seeking Sir Patrick's advice. Although he said he ordered the move in the morning of 6 November, before the media began to inquire about the donations, the letter was not posted until the following evening. His assertion that the letter was meant mainly to ask whether Labour should pay back the pre-election £1m, rather than to seek guidance on the further donation, is only partially borne out by the text.

Last night, Downing Street published a secretary's notes of the 16 October meeting, but they served only to confirm that Mr Ecclestone and the head of the Federation Internationale de l'Automobile, Max Mosley, had threatened to take their sport abroad if the ban was imposed.

However, in a further development Richard Branson, who is advising the government on alternatives to tobacco sponsorship, has written to *The Independent* saying that if Formula One withdrew he would bring American-style Indy car racing to Britain to replace it.

The Conservative trade and industry spokesman, John Redwood, said in a separate interview that the Government should make a full statement on the issue.

"This is a story riddled with holes and this is today's version of the story. It's not an issue about party political funding. There is nothing wrong with individuals or companies giving money to parties if they like their policies or they like their principles. What would be wrong is if a party came to government and then was prepared to change its policies or its principles in order to say thank-you for donations or to receive new ones," he said.

Leading article, page 14
Branson letter, page 14
Glenda Cooper, page 15

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COLUMN ONE

The beasts that keep an MP awake at night

Paul Tyler, the Liberal Democrat MP for North Cornwall, is an unlikely big game hunter. One could hardly picture the MP, who spends his free time pottering in the garden or sailing, posing with rifle in hand and his boot resting on a dead tiger.

Yet despite assurances from government officials that wild beasts are not roaming the farmlands and national parks of Britain, Mr Tyler is demanding that the search for pumas, lynxes and cougars must continue. His suspicions have been fuelled by the mysterious savaging of five ewes while grazing on a landscaped tip in his constituency at St Austell.



Mr Tyler has been told by five Cornish councillors that they spotted a puma taking a drink from a pool in the same area while on a council coach trip last month. Planning committee chairwoman Joan Vincent said that another councillor drew her attention to the animal as they were passing clay workings near Penwithick.

"It was drinking from a pool," said Mrs Vincent. "It was larger than an Alsatian dog. It was very dark brown, with a longish tail, curved at the end. It was definitely a big animal of some kind."

Mr Tyler said this weekend: "I shall be approaching the Ministry of Agriculture on Monday to make sure the previous investigation, which I instigated three years ago, is resumed."

But while Mr Tyler would have no trouble convincing other MPs of the reality of the R Honorable Dennis Skinner MP, aka the Beast of Bosover has had less success in establishing the existence of the Beast of Bodmin (pictured, allegedly), the Beast of Cupar in Scotland and other "big cats".

Charles Wilson, a zoologist who carried out the previous government inquiry, concluded there was no evidence to show large cats were living on Bodmin Moor. Nevertheless, Mr Tyler has collected a dossier of big cat sightings and says the government inquiry "did not produce any conclusive evidence either way".

— Ian Burrell

Jonathan Powell

Following a report in Saturday's *Independent*, we have been asked by Jonathan Powell, Chief of Staff to Tony Blair, to state that Mr Powell is not a *Formula One* supporter, nor did he meet Bernie Ecclestone before the election. Mr Powell says he was not a "key figure" in raising the £1m donation to the Labour Party, nor was he a "key figure" in persuading the Prime Minister to exempt *Formula One*.

Selfridges Food Hall evening

The date of *The Independent* and Selfridges gastronomic event failed to appear in the details in the *Independent Saturday Magazine*. It will be held on 1 December at 7.30pm. We apologise for any inconvenience.

CONTENTS

Young Britain	3	The way we live	12
Iraq	5	Interview	13
Politics and funding	5	Leader and letters	14
News	6	Comment	15
World news	7	Gazette	16
Dissidents	8	Business and City	17-19
Education	10	The back page	20
Fashion	11		

PEOPLE



Dead girl's body discovered by her father

A 14-year-old girl found brutally murdered in a field after taking a neighbour's dog for a walk was discovered by her father, police said yesterday.

The body of music-loving Kate Bushell was found by her father, Jeremy, in the corner of a field just yards from her home in Exeter. He had gone to search for her after she failed to return home on Saturday night.

Kate had been attacked with a sharp instrument — possibly a knife — which had yet to be recovered, said Detective Superintendent Mike Stephens at a news conference in Exeter. He had not yet ruled the victim having been sexually assaulted.

Kate, a pupil at Exeter's St Thomas High School, was found dead around 300 yards from her family's detached house in Burrator Drive, on the edge of a large private estate on the outskirts of the city. Police said Kate went out with the Jack Russell terrier called Gemma, belonging to neighbours who had gone away. At around 6.45pm on Saturday, she was reported missing by her father and mother Susan, who started their own search of the area. They toured the extensive estate in their car and called in police when they failed to find her, said Det Supt Stephens.

She was found at around 7.35pm in a field off Exwick Lane near a stile by her father, who called for police assistance. The lane is around 200 yards from the family home and has steep fields on either side. Det Supt Stephens said Kate, who was wearing a turquoise lagool and dark trousers, had been brutally murdered and a sexual attack had not been ruled out. A post mortem examination was continuing yesterday.

Det Supt Stephens appealed for anyone in the area who may have information about Kate to come forward and he also wanted to hear from people who walk their dogs or use that area. He said they also wanted information about anyone seen acting suspiciously since the murder.

"This is the murder of a young, innocent girl in a residential area. We ask for as much public assistance as possible," he said.

Planners spill the beans on Maxwell's house

It was the sort of annoying thing that could happen to anyone who was made bankrupt owing hundreds of millions of pounds.

There Kevin Maxwell was, wanting to build a tennis court in the grounds of his family's 16th Century manor house, when he found that there was a bit of a planning glitch — mainly that he didn't have permission to live there.

It was fortunate for him that, despite going down with debts of £406.5m owed to Mirror Group pensioners, he and his wife, Pandora, decided to look into building the tennis court, otherwise they

might never have found out that Moulshford Manor, near Wallingford, Oxon, did not have planning permission to be used as a residential dwelling.

It was while making inquiries into laying the tennis court that they found out that the manor house used to be a nursing hostel and was registered for institutional use only.

According to planning minutes from South Oxfordshire District Council, Mrs Maxwell has since applied for planning permission to change the use of the manor house to residential.

Today is the deadline for any-

one to lodge objections, but it is unlikely anyone will — unless any of the pensioners have already heard about the application. They were not happy with Robert Maxwell's stewardship of their funds. He raided pension schemes over and over again to prop up his crumbling business empire.

Kevin Maxwell was the signatory of a number of movements of shares from pension schemes that were never returned, but he and his brother, Ian, were cleared of fraud in January 1996. He has been discharged as a bankrupt.

— Steve Boggan

UPDATE

EQUALITY

NI Catholics still under-represented

The increasing rate of Catholics in top civil service and local government jobs in Northern Ireland must quicken, a report said today. Even though there has been a "marked improvement" in the share of Catholics holding senior grades since 1990, more progress was needed, according to study by the Fair Employment Commission. The overall increase in the five years since then was 4.2 per cent, but Catholics still remained under-represented among senior grades in some areas of the public sector, the report said.

They were least well represented at the most senior levels. And while the potential for change may be limited because of a continuing downward pressure on resources, the report said the FEC believed further action needed to be taken, particularly in the civil service.

SOCIETY

Night owls keep the tills ringing

One in three people — nearly 17 million of us — now go shopping at night, according to new research. Unsociable working hours mean that people are now demanding more shops and services to be available 24 hours a day.

At the moment more than one million people in the UK work between 9-11pm and around 750,000 work between 2 and 5am. It is estimated that these figures will double in the next 10 years. According to the survey carried out by Shell, which is promoting the shops at its all night garages, more than half of the population are in favour of a 24-hour society.

— Glenda Cooper



MEDIA

Violent cartoon leads to complaints

A cartoon zombie and chainsaw villain provoked a hail of complaints when they were shown on children's television. Parents were furious when ITV screened the violent animation *Reboot: To Mend And Defend* at 4.40pm.

The Independent Television Commission, has upheld the views of 19 parents who said the scenes scared their children.

Broadcaster Meridian said young children are familiar with ghoulish characters in computer games and films and that fantasy and horror often help youngsters deal with anxieties about growing up. The ITC admitted many children are familiar with such films and games, with or without their parents' consent, but the images were still not suitable for young viewers.

The ITC's decision follows the recent Broadcasting Standards Commission report on the predominance of cartoons in children's broadcasting.

TOURIST RATES

Australia (dollars)	2.35	Italy (lira)	2,799
Austria (schillings)	20.00	Japan (yen)	210.78
Belgium (francs)	58.79	Malta (lira)	0.63
Canada (\$)	2.33	Netherlands (guilders)	3.21
Cyprus (pounds)	0.83	Norway (krone)	11.70
Denmark (krone)	10.89	Portugal (escudos)	288.69
France (francs)	9.52	Spain (pesetas)	239.06
Germany (marks)	2.85	Sweden (krone)	12.47
Greece (drachme)	451.00	Switzerland (francs)	2.32
Hong Kong (\$)	12.71	Turkey (lira)	303,200
Ireland (punts)	1.09	USA (\$)	1.66

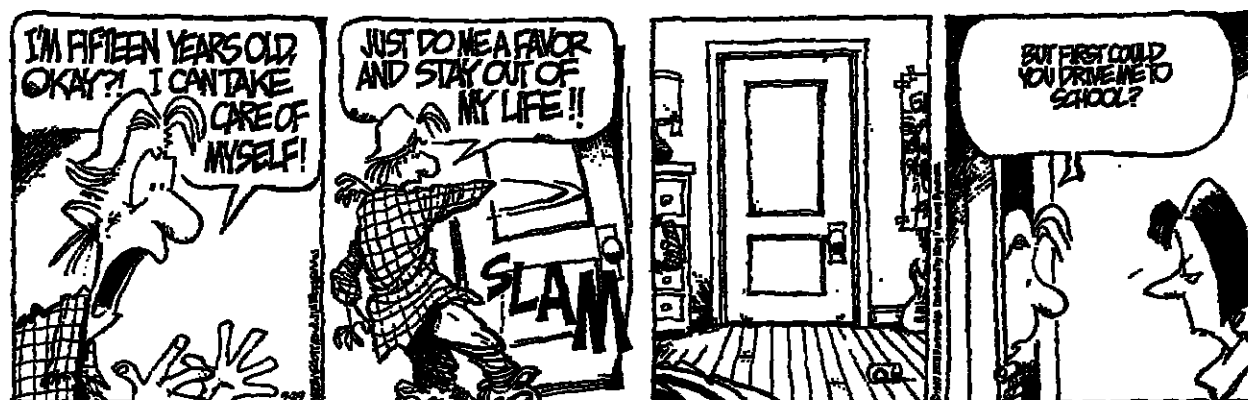
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3/YOUNG BRITAIN

Tomorrow belongs to us: the new generation

BY NICOLE VEASH
AND JACK O'SULLIVAN

Today's young people are an earnest bunch. They are maturing earlier than ever into responsible self-reliant adults, according to an exhaustive survey of the next generation.

Many have grown up in broken families and have lost their parents' sense of belonging to any community. Uncertain job prospects add to their insecurity. So, lacking traditional supports, they are forced to create fresh sources of stability and safety.

This extraordinary picture of youthful seriousness emerges from a survey, called 2020 Vision, conducted over two years by the Industrial Society of 10,000 young people aged between 12 and 25. It portrays a generation bent on personal self-improvement while trying to bolster threatened institutions that offer security.

More than half want to strengthen marriage by making it harder to divorce if there are children involved.

A majority think marriage is the best living environment for men and women, against just one in six who think living with a partner is best, and one in 12 who want to live alone. A third think it should be made harder to get married.

"Marriage is important. It is a sign of stability, a foundation and that's important for children," says Jill Patton, 18, a student from Newtownards, Northern Ireland. Danny Docherty, 18, from Birkenhead, a DJ at night and volunteer youth worker by day, agrees. "It's important to have someone to come home to. Someone who cares for you like you care for them," he says.

Top of this generation's list

for higher government spending are the key departments that will keep a person healthy and prepared for work - the NHS and education. And, despite several years of falling unemployment, the majority rank unemployment as the most pressing problem in the United Kingdom today.

There is a strong work ethic with only a quarter disagreeing with the statement that "work gives meaning to life". Work is worthwhile even if unpaid, with a high level of volunteering (15 per cent of young women). As Danny Docherty says about his unpaid youth work: "I don't care about being paid. I'd rather do a job I enjoy and not be paid than make money and do something I don't enjoy. I make enough out of DJing to do the voluntary work."

The most important skills are not technical or academic. Some 43 per cent say being able to get on with people is the top priority, along with being able to manage money. "You need to know what to do when you get bills through the post and where to go if you are in trouble financially or mentally," says Mr Docherty.

His generation is obsessed with getting educated and mak-

ing themselves as employable as possible. Nine out of ten say education should continue after school. And this can-do generation does not sit back when out of work: 50 per cent say that if jobs they would get more qualifications, with just a quarter waiting around for the right job. Nor do they expect a handout - better social security benefits rank tenth in their order of areas needing more

spending, behind public transport and leisure services.

Young Britons are also highly critical of the education system for not preparing them properly for life, with the majority (63 per cent) feeling school let them down. A third say boredom at school damaged their education.

"I'm a big believer that school doesn't teach life skills," says Karl Reza, 24, who was homeless at 17, when a family row forced him on to the streets. Today he is setting up his own public relations company specialising in youth work. "You need social skills to get a job. School focuses too much on textbooks. There seems to be a belief that children are at home with Mum and Dad caring for them in the background and preparing them for life, but not everyone has perfect par-

ents. My generation is not a product of those sorts of parents. More and more young people are suffering from divorce."

The extent of isolation felt by this generation is astonishing in a country that until recently called itself Christian, prided itself on local loyalties and was infamous for its class allegiances. Just one in five feels part of a community, while only one in ten identifies with a religion or race. Two per cent see themselves as belonging to a political party, while 13 per cent feel part of a social class.

"I'm very much a creature of the planet," says Karl Reza, born in Glasgow of Mauritian parents. "I don't belong to any particular land mass. My skin is brown but I don't feel Mauritian. I feel more British when I go abroad. I don't belong to any

religion. I'm open to the existence of anything but I don't believe in God. Some of the Buddhist philosophies I find quite palatable. I don't want to be a member of a class. I'm a person. I've never followed on political party. I'm not a believer in one though if you had to label me I would probably fall somewhere between Labour and the Liberal Democrats."

In the hostile world they inhabit, the majority have been affected by crime by the age of 19. Family background, boredom and drugs are blamed by half as the chief causes of lawlessness. For 75 per cent, particularly women, the greatest fear is physical attack. Mr Reza says: "I think it is disgusting that women can't travel at night. I know women who just can't be as free as I can be. They can't live their lives to the full."

2020 Vision is co-ordinated by the Industrial Society. The Action Agenda along with full results of the research will be launched next Monday.

All work and no play in the stressful Nineties

Najneen Ahmed is worried. She's worried about her degree. She's worried about not having any skills. And she's worried about the job market. At 18 she is typical of a generation who juggle their lives in true Nineties style.

"I'm not alone when I say that the pressure on us to prepare for the future is enormous," she says. "We have to think about getting good grades at school and about getting into a respectable university, then getting a job at the end of it. There is no time for anything outside of that."

Through 10,000 interviews with young people, a picture emerges of a generation plagued by traditionally adult concerns. Forget City types who burn up under excessive pressure, young people are today's stress casualties.

They live a life which is all work and no play and are often forced to give up hobbies to concentrate on their education. While many are employed in part-time work, others start laying the foundation for future careers at 14.

Like hundreds in her generation, Najneen found this pressure all too much. "During my A-levels I had a kind of nervous breakdown from the pressure of work," she says. "Now I'm having a year off before starting university just to get myself back together again."

"I have always been dedicated to my academic work and I didn't have much life outside studying for my subjects. In fact all my leisure activities were somehow related to my exams, like going to drama."

As a pupil at Dunottar, a private all-girls school in Reigate, Surrey, Najneen passed four A-levels, gaining three grade As and a B, but was still rejected by her first choice university.

"I had set my heart on going to Edinburgh University and in a way I had already planned my future, so it was very hard when I got that rejection letter. I think this contributed to my breakdown, you see I just never expected to be rejected because my academic work was very good," she says.

"It made me realise that life is a lot tougher than I expected, so I took a long, hard look at my CV and came to the conclusion that it was too academic."

Najneen is now spending most of her gap year working, partly to save up money for university, partly to build up her CV to improve future work prospects.

Traditionally, the gap year between school and university was for travel and freedom. But as Jo Gardiner, campaigns director for the Industrial Society explains, the time when students went travelling to exotic parts for the hell of it is long gone.

"Gap years used to be a time for personal growth and fun," she says. "Now they are all about focusing on skills development which help young people launch themselves into the working world as successfully as possible."

"The young are like no other generation before them. They are balancing three things: education, part-time work, family and are expected to plan for their future career."

Packing adult demands into a teenage life seems to be a necessity for most. The young want to do well at school, in order to insure future job security, while earning enough money to give them sought after independence from their parents. By the age of 18, a staggering 83 per cent of young people have been employed in some kind of paid work.

David Hopes, a 15-year-old with two jobs, is a just one example of this statistic. Every weekday evening is dedicated to homework and most of this weekend is spent working, with only Friday nights off for fun.

"I'm saving up for a holiday in Texas with the Scouts. I'm going to need about £700 and I don't expect my parents to pay all of it," he says.

"I don't really have much time for myself as the moment, but that is just the way things are for a lot of young people."

Every Saturday night, from five in the evening to midnight, David chops vegetables and washes dishes in a Chinese takeaway. Catering is always hectic. David has no break and only just manages time to sit down and eat his free evening meal. He takes home £20 for the night's work.

"I don't like working, but I've got no choice if I want to go on holiday," he says.

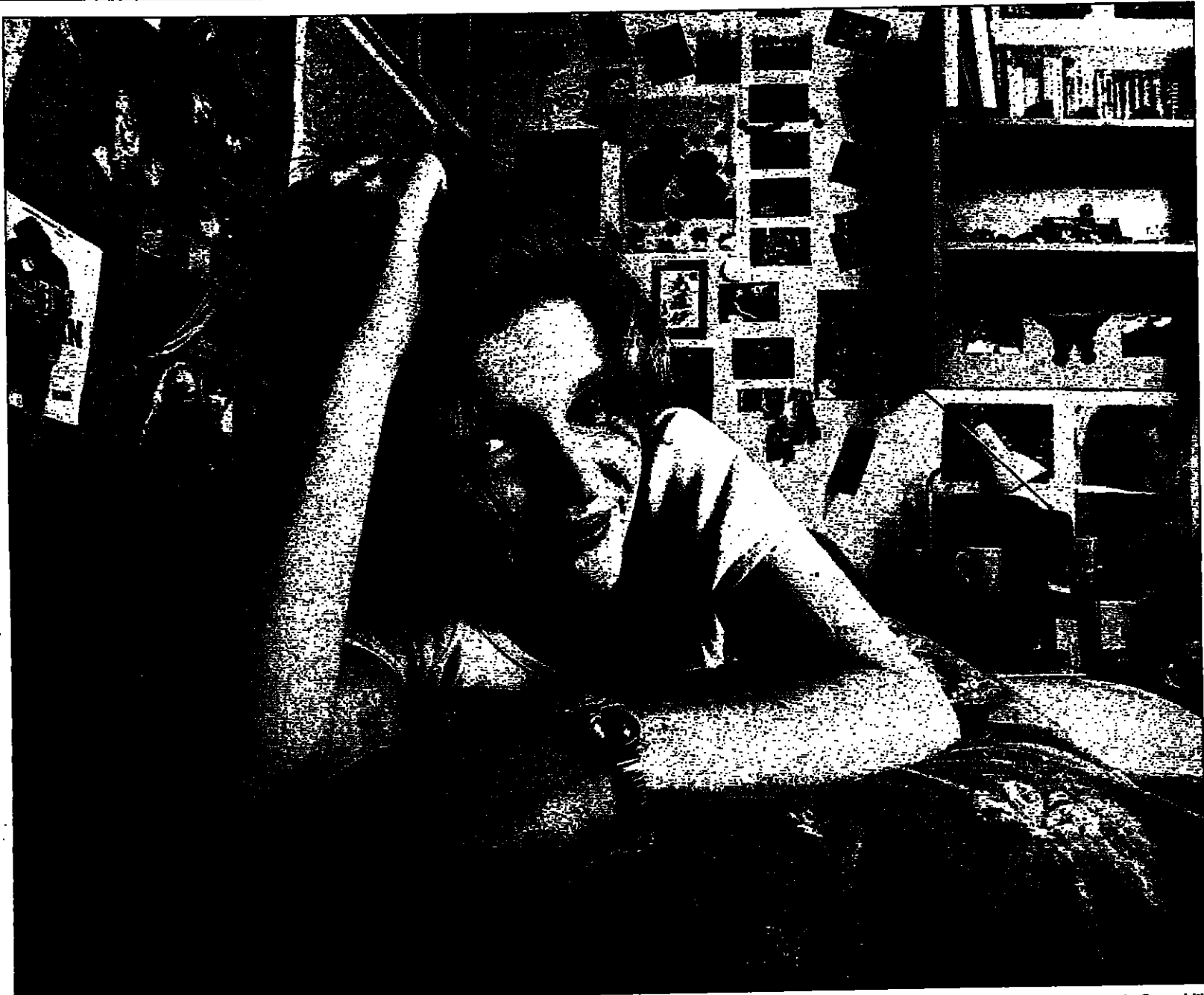
On alternate Saturday afternoons, David gives out promotional leaflets at Newtownards shopping centre in Northern Ireland, for the Belfast Telegraph.

"The leafletting is actually quite fun. I get £15 for three hours work, which is good pay," he says. "I don't have a lot of time to go out to the cinema or just sit at home relaxing, but I always manage to get to Scouts on Friday evenings."

Young Britons are hard grafters. From their early teens they are stuck into a mini-race, where the stakes are high. Some burn out, others manage to juggle their way through childhood.

As Najneen says: "We have to give up our leisure time to plan for the future. That is just the way young people think these days. You have to juggle all sorts of things at the same time. That is the definition of success."

— Nicole Veash and Jack O'Sullivan



Chloe Beattie at Keele University: 'Most young people I know are optimistic. If I work hard I'll do something with my life' Photograph: Steve Hill

'Everyone needs to feel secure, to have some stability'

Chloe Beattie, 19, of Workington, Cumbria, is in the first year of an English and art degree at Keele University.

"I've always done part-time work from an early age. When I was 16, I was doing the tills in Marks & Spencer and during my A-levels I did some waitressing. Most summer holidays I worked in a factory. "People said I shouldn't do a part-time job when I was studying because they thought it would be hard to combine

with the amount of homework I got. But I needed the money and you can always find a way of fitting everything in."

"Apart from my job and studying for my exams, I had to decide what to do in the future. It was all very stressful because I was worried about making the wrong choice. I was bogged down with everything and didn't have much time to think."

"In the end things didn't turn out very well. I took an art foundation course at a local college, but dropped out because it wasn't right for me."

"I ended up having a year out. I didn't go travelling or any-

thing, but I went to live in London, which was a long way from home."

"I got a job in an office which gave me invaluable experience and turned out to be the best thing. I got the chance to learn things about the working environment which I would never have known if I had gone straight to university. Plus I've got real work experience, which is really important in today's job market. Now when I leave Keele I won't fall into the trap of having a degree but no experience. I definitely made the right choice about not going travelling."

"The society we live in is unstable. There is no security in the job market and a lot of people are worried about that. There is no guarantee that after doing a degree you can get a job. We need something stable in our life. That is why most young people want to get to settle down in a relationship because everyone needs to feel secure."

"Most young people I know are optimistic. I don't go around saying I'll never get a job. I know the job market is insecure but you can't just give in. If I carry on working hard I'll get a job and do something with my life."



New faces tackle old questions of childcare, jobs and commitment

THE ATHLETE: Jamie Baulch, 24, is a 400-metre runner. He was part of the 4x400 British relay team which won the silver medal in the 1996 Olympics.

"Young men definitely want to play a bigger role in child care. I've got a baby boy, who is two, and I'm really into that whole family package."

"I love playing a role in family life and sharing responsibilities is what it's all about."

"I do my fair share of domestic chores. I like staying in and looking after the children or doing the cleaning. It's definitely different from the past."

"A lot of people who are older than me say it's not my job to look after the baby. Not only do I think it is, I also love doing it."

THE POLITICIAN: Claire Ward, 25, Labour MP for Watford, is the youngest woman in the Commons.

"Most young people grow up with a sense of hard work. Twenty or 30 years ago you could always find a job and someone going to university would be guaranteed employment at the end of their degree."

"Today's young people don't have that blasé approach that our parents had about the job market. We know that employers are looking for everything. They want more than just qualifications, they want life experience and practical skills. If you do take a gap year and go travelling that's great, but it is not going to give employers what they want."

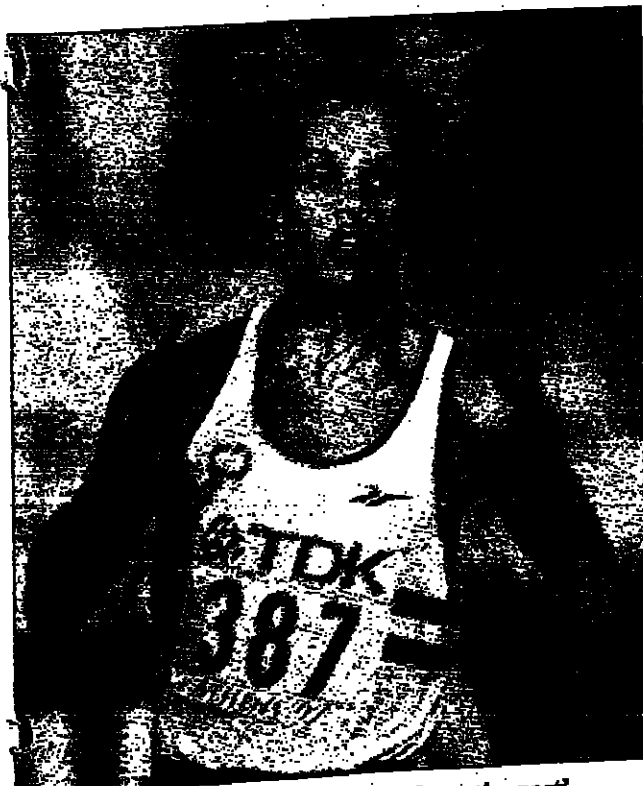
"The pressure is definitely on young people to do better in every aspect of their life."

THE FOOTBALLER: Craig Burley, 26, is a midfielder who joined Celtic from Chelsea for £2.5m. He also plays for Scotland.

"I found it difficult at school because I concentrated on football so much. I've been lucky because this has paid off and I'm able to earn a living, but some of my friends weren't so fortunate. Later on I might regret not getting a better education, but it's all right for now."

"Older generations always think the young are layabouts but that is really not the case any more. Everyone I know in the sporting field is really hard-working."

"If you are not responsible and committed to your game you are never going to get on. Everything needs to be done with 100 per cent effort otherwise you lose the edge."



Jamie Baulch, athlete: 'It's different from the past'



Claire Wood, MP: 'The pressure is on young people'

Whatever you think about foxes, you have to admire their guts.

Most huntsmen will tell you that the death of a fox is swift and painless.

"A quick nip in the back of the neck," they say, "and he's dead."

If only.

Foxhounds tend to go for the softer option.

The belly.

This brings the fox down, but doesn't immediately kill it.

Death usually occurs by disembowelment.

There are those who would argue that this is no more than a fox deserves.

After all, they say, foxes are themselves killers and need to be controlled.

Whilst it's true that foxes do occasionally take lambs, many of these are likely to be already dead.

(20% of lambs born each year die from hypothermia, malnutrition or disease, or are

stillborn.) And the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food estimates the number of lambs taken by foxes to be not significant.

The notion that hunting is necessary to control the fox population is equally unfounded.

At least 200,000 foxes are killed every year by shooting, snaring or in road accidents. Only about 15,000 are killed by hunting.



Where foxes are deemed a pest, it is more efficient and more humane for them to be shot by a marksman.

The RSPCA has long campaigned against all hunting with dogs.

We believe that the hounding and killing of wild animals is cruel and unacceptable in a civilised society.

A Private Member's Bill seeking to ban hunting with dogs comes before Parliament

on November 28th.

A MORI poll taken in October this year shows that 73% of people support the Bill.

We want to turn that overwhelming weight of public opinion into legislation.

November 28th is a Friday when many MPs will be back in their constituencies.

We want you to persuade them to stay in the House that day and vote to end this cruel "sport" once and for all.

You can write to your MP direct at the House of Commons.

Or call the RSPCA on 01403 223 284 (9am-5pm weekdays) and we'll send you a campaign pack.

Foxhunting is cruel and unnecessary.

It's about time we made it illegal.



Ban hunting with dogs.

THE AIMS OF THE RSPCA ARE TO PREVENT CRUELTY AND PROMOTE KINDNESS TO ANIMALS.

5/IRAQ

THE INDEPENDENT
MONDAY
17 NOVEMBER 1997

US has second thoughts as allies reject force

Washington appeared to be backing away from a military strike against Iraq yesterday. Mary Dejevsky in Washington says the cooling of American rhetoric came amid mounting evidence that international support for military action was lacking.

The US military build-up in the Gulf continued yesterday, with the dispatch of a second aircraft carrier, the *George Washington*, and more fighter planes, but the emphasis of US statements moved conspicuously away from warmongering, as most of Washington's Gulf War allies made clear their reluctance to support military action against Iraq.

Madeline Albright, the US Secretary of State, slipped a series of additional stops - Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Kuwait - into her whistle-stop Middle East tour. But she had to leave even Kuwait with no support for the use of armed force against its former invader.

On television talkshows, US administration officials emphasised their strong preference for a diplomatic outcome.



William Cohen, the Defense Secretary, said the US was continuing to "seek a peaceful resolution" and played down the evident lack of international support for the military option. "I don't think we should speculate about who would be in there," he said.

President Clinton's National Security Adviser, Sandy Berger, dismissed Kuwait's rejection of the military option, saying this was the view of "only the foreign minister". But, he said: "Our first preference is to solve this by diplomatic means". He said the US was still engaged in a "concerted effort through our friends and allies", to persuade the Iraqi leader, Saddam Hussein, to back down.

The leaders of Britain, France and Russia, were among those contacted by Mr Clinton over the weekend, but only Britain was making active military preparations to support the US. A 35-minute conversation with President Jacques Chirac led only to a verbal condemnation of Iraq and a call for a diplomatic settlement.

Tariq Aziz being protected by a bodyguard yesterday in Paris, where he was en route from the UN in New York. Photograph: AFP

Tariq Aziz, the Iraqi deputy prime minister, who spent last week trying to present Baghdad's view at the UN, was still in Paris yesterday, reportedly preparing for a North African tour to drum up support.

US commentators are also warning of the likely diplomatic fall-out if the US uses force unilaterally. While opinion polls show public support for military action, the retired Gulf War general Norman Schwarzkopf warned that what the US was trying to achieve in the current conflict was difficult to obtain.

If 43 days of saturation bombing had failed to persuade Saddam Hussein to change his mind in 1991, there was no reason why he would submit as a result of military action now. This time, it was not simply a question of punishing the Iraqi leader, but of trying to get him to allow Americans back into UN weapons inspections teams. In this, Gen Schwarzkopf warned, a military strike could be counterproductive.

Albright's rhetoric fails to overcome Arab feelings of betrayal over Israel

Madeline Albright, the US Secretary of State, went straight to the point - unwittingly - when she addressed the largely boycotted Arab-Israeli economic conference in Qatar yesterday.

"Saddam Hussein has lied, delayed, obstructed and tried to deceive," she told delegations from Israel and from just six Arab states. But that is exactly how the leaders of Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Syria, Lebanon and other absentees would have described Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's adherence to the Middle East "peace process".

Mrs Albright, who truncated her visit to Qatar for a vain mission to persuade the Saudis, Kuwaitis and Bahrainis to join America's latest crusade against Saddam, also lectured the Arabs on their refusal to talk to the Israelis in Qatar: "The effort to increase regional economic co-operation is not, as some people seem to feel, a favour to any particular nation."

The Arabs disagree. They see Mrs Albright as fronting Israel's own policies in the Middle East and America as acting as Israel's spokesman in the region.

The irony is both deep and wounding for Washington. President Bill Clinton wants to talk tough and threaten Saddam Hussein for breaking international rules - compliance with UN resolutions on weapons of mass destruction - while refusing to talk tough to an Israeli leader who is refusing to withdraw his troops from occupied Arab land - compliance with UN Security Council resolution 242 - and is refusing the Palestinians a state and a capital in Jerusalem.

As the Egyptian newspaper *Al-Ahram* put it on Saturday, Saddam Hussein's timing is brilliant: "It makes it hard for any Arab nation to ally itself to Washington."

For once, it seems, Saddam has acted with great shrewdness, challenging Washington at the very moment when the Arabs feel deeply betrayed by the United States over the destruction of the Arab-Israeli "peace process". Even Kuwait, which owes its liberation from the odious Saddam to America, has condemned the idea of military action against Iraq.

Many Kuwaitis are related to Iraqi families and the suffering of Iraqi civilians now dominates the headlines of the Arab press. And not without reason.

While children die in Iraq of poor food or lack of medical attention, the Arabs are told that further punishment must be inflicted on them to bring down the dictatorship of a man whose military power was originally augmented by American and European weapons.

If President George Bush and Secretary of State James Baker could once hold an Arab alliance against Iraq together, this heritage has been squandered by President Clinton's weakness in the face of Mr Netanyahu.

The emir of Qatar, Sheikh Hamad al-Khalifa al-Thani, opened the economic conference with a fierce attack against Israel - and thus, by extension, America. Not since 1967 has Washington's stock fallen so low in the Arab world.

— Robert Fisk

IN TOMORROW'S
INDEPENDENT

EYE

Nigel Planer:
how I went to
jail for my part
in Chicago



ARTS

Tom Lubbock
gets away with
the fairies at the
Royal Academy

NETWORK+
Ralph Nader's
crusade against
Bill Gates

SCHOOL
LEAGUE
TABLES
Those GCSE
ratings in full

lift off

digital

Why do all ten of the leading aerospace companies depend on Digital for an entire universe of networked systems and services? Same reason your company can count on us: we deliver. In everything from Windows NT and UNIX, to the Internet and beyond. Find us at www.digital.com or call 0800 393 200. And get ready to win in a networked world.

Buoyant economy gives Brown cash to play with

The rapid fall in unemployment during the summer has delivered a £1bn windfall to government coffers. Diane Coyle, Economics Editor, considers how Gordon Brown might spend it.

The number of people claiming benefit is already a quarter of a million lower than at the time of Gordon Brown's July Budget, and the drop in joblessness will allow him to present a much brighter outlook for the public finances in his "pre-Budget" statement to the House of Commons next week.

The Chancellor will be able to announce a reduction in his targets for government borrowing, or – if he wishes – find some extra money for the hard-pressed National Health Service this winter.

The Treasury is keen to downplay, for now, the scope for increased spending in order to keep the lid on bids from the spending departments. Mr Brown has pledged to stick to the public spending total for this year and next, set by his Conservative predecessor.

However, he has already found extra funds for health and education. In July, he cut the "contingency reserve" – the money in the spending plans not earmarked for particular departments – by £2.2bn, dividing the money between health and education. Last month, the defence budget was raided to fund a cash injection for NHS.

In addition, the National Register of Assets due to be unveiled this week has revealed a wide range of government properties that will be sold to raise money for high-priority public services.

As well as national treasures like valuable works of art, the survey has uncovered land and buildings that will be sold off during the next few years.

The strength of the economy since Labour came to power means that almost all City commentators expect the Chancellor to be able to better his £11bn target for the Public Sector Borrowing Requirement in the current year by £2bn or more. Lower unemployment, tough spending control and higher tax revenues have contributed to this performance.

David Owen, an economist at investment bank Dresdner Kleinwort Benson, said: "The public finances are in better shape than anybody expected a few months ago, although they

will stop improving as the economy slows next year."

Even if the Treasury decides to be cautious about its forecast for future tax receipts, the convention of assuming that unemployment will stay at a constant level will give Mr Brown £1bn leeway compared with July. Although, formally, spending on benefits for the jobless is counted outside the expenditure planning total, the saving on social security payments could be spent without breaking the pledge on sticking to the planning total by releasing more money from the reserve.

The "pre-Budget" statement next week is intended to set out the background for decisions to be announced in the Budget proper in March, and will not include a new set of public spending plans. However, it will set out the Treasury's updated forecasts for the economy and the state of the Government's finances.

Few observers believe the Chancellor will not take the opportunity to make a popular announcement on extra funding for health and education, just as he did in July. That Budget was also billed as excluding public spending, allowing Mr Brown to pull a rabbit from his hat on the day.



Realising assets: Ministry of Defence land could be sold to raise money for high-priority public services

Photograph: Christopher Jones

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your savings accumulate over the full two year term of the bond for a return even higher than the figure above. Whether you want to save from £2,000 to £250,000, the NatWest Millennium Bond is for you.

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Britain will join euro soon after election, opinion leaders predict

A referendum on the single European currency will be held soon after the next election, and the British people will vote to join – that is the prediction of a panel of opinion-formers interviewed for *The Independent*. John Rentoul has the results of our exclusive opinion poll.

The Government seems to have achieved a decisive shift in expectations, persuading opinion leaders that it can win the battle for the hearts and minds of a sceptical electorate and join the euro within five years.

Although polls of the general public suggest that there is a two-to-one majority at present against the single currency, 67 per cent of the panel interviewed for *The Independent* expect a "Yes" vote when the time comes.

Only 10 per cent predict a "No" vote, with 23 per cent saying it will be too close to call.

Of our sample of opinion formers, 83 per cent think that the currency referendum will indeed take place "early in the next parliament", a plan which Gordon Brown, the Chancellor, announced last month was the Government's intention.

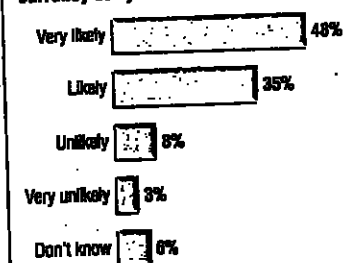
The opinion formers, however, think the Government will break its promise to hold a separate referendum on changing the voting system during this parliament.

Despite a manifesto commitment, more than half of our panel, 53 per cent, think it is "unlikely" that this vote will be held before the next election, with around a quarter, 26 per cent, saying it was "likely". The rest had no opinion.

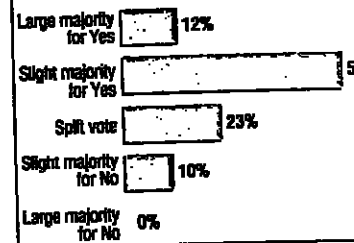
The Prime Minister's refusal to commit himself to any form of proportional voting system appears to have persuaded opinion leaders that he will ditch the pledge, first made by John Smith.

Mr Blair has already been criticised for relying too heavily on referendums, but of our panel 50 per cent agree that it is "important" to have one on voting reform, while only 30 per cent of the panel disagree.

How likely do you think it is that there will be a referendum on entry to the single currency early in the next parliament?



What do you think the most likely result will be?



Opinion Leader Research interviewed a sample of 100 business executives, civil servants, politicians, media editors and think tank chiefs for *The Independent*, between 3 and 10 November.

The effect of City uncertainty over the Government's intentions, followed by the Chancellor's statement on the euro last month, has been to transform the climate of opinion.

Mr Brown's talk of the need to prepare for the switch from the pound to the euro, combined with a strong declaration of support in principle for making the change, seems to have generated a momentum which will carry public opinion.

The most recent MORI poll of the general public found last month they intended to vote against joining the single currency by a 54 per cent to 27 per cent majority, with 19 per cent undecided. This was unchanged since the election, but slightly less hostile than towards the end of last year.

The *Independent*'s panel holds dramatically different views: 58 per cent intend to vote "Yes" and only 17 per cent "No", with 25 per cent undecided.

Workers to be compensated for Tory disregard of European law

Public-sector workers were denied key rights under European law for nearly a decade and will now be able to claim compensation, the Government will concede today.

Ministers have decided that previous Conservative administrations, largely under Margaret Thatcher, ignored their obligations to ensure that working conditions were protected when private businesses took over public services under the Compulsory Competitive Tendering policy.

Tens of thousands of workers lost their jobs and others saw their wages cut in the period between 1983 and 1993.

Unions yesterday greeted the decision as a significant breakthrough and will launch fresh proceedings on behalf of some 1,500 health and local government workers claiming "thousands of pounds each". Exact amounts are not yet available, but it will cost the government several million pounds.

Other compensation cases may also be brought, but some union officials are pessimistic about their chances of success.

Roger Poole, assistant general secretary of the public-service union Unison, said the real significance of the case was that it proved governments could not flout European law and escape the consequences. And he added: "The new government has been lumbered with a Tory legacy of illegality. This landmark ruling will be a posthumous page in the last government's book of injustice."

Jack Dromey, national secretary of the Transport and General Workers' Union, said Conservative governments had deliberately broken the law. "They wanted to promote a Dutch auction of who would pay the least in the privatisation of public services."

Mick Graham, national secretary of GMB general union, said the ruling would show that the Conservatives had failed business as well as union members by giving misleading advice.

"I hope that contractors who have been taken through legal proceedings on the basis of the Tories' guidance now sue the party for bad faith."

Under the British version of European law, only private sector workers in commercial undertakings were protected. However, the European directives on which the UK law – the transfer of undertakings (Protection of Employment) regulations 1981 – was based, protected all workers.

— Barrie Clement, Labour Editor

Profession to compt

The growing popularity and high price of CD-Roms have made them the latest target for the type of criminals who once robbed banks.

In a report that Microsoft, the manufacturer of the most popular CD-ROM software, have become the £30m victims of the highest heist to date.

British nurses spared beh

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Professional thieves turn to computer software

The growing popularity and high value of CD-Roms have made them the latest target for the type of criminals who once robbed banks.

Ian Burrell reports that Microsoft, the manufacturer of the most sought-after packages, have become the £30m victims of the biggest heist to date.

The two security guards on duty at a printing firm on an industrial estate in a small Scottish town could have been excused for anticipating a quiet Sunday night's shift.

But shortly before 11pm, a gunman and three other masked associates burst onto the premises of M & A Thomson Litho in East Kilbride. The terrified guards were tied up as the robbers, who knew exactly what they wanted, loaded up one of the com-

pany's own vans. They filled it with more than 100,000 CD-Roms, including popular titles like the encyclopaedia package *Encarta* and *Office 97*, a desktop publishing program. They also took more than 200,000 certificates which were intended as proof that the software was legal.

The gang escaped with a haul worth nearly £10m, but with lost sales the raid could cost the company £30m.

It was nearly five hours before the two security guards broke free to raise the alarm, unhurt but traumatised by their experience, eight days ago. But it was nearly a week before Microsoft, which owned the stolen material and had contracted the Scottish company to help package the software, decided to go public on the significance of the crime.

David Gregory, Microsoft's anti-piracy manager, issued a statement from the company's British headquarters in Reading, Berkshire, saying that the gang had been "well-orchestrated" and offering a

"substantial reward" for information leading to their arrests.

He said: "Software theft is an increasingly serious issue involving well organised criminal gangs. Software theft defrauds the customer, who ends up with counterfeit or stolen goods which are not what they claim to be."

Microsoft believes that the team of robbers probably operates a sophisticated network of distribution with outlets all over the world.

Tony Collins, executive editor of *Computer Weekly* magazine, said the company had every reason to be concerned and said the raid was a "worrying development".

Mr Collins said that the demand for popular Microsoft packages like *Encarta* was unrivalled by other manufacturers, but the price of around £400 for a relatively small product made them a perfect target for thieves. The CD-Roms cost only around £5 to manufacture.



Child's play: Vietnamese doll by Gotz (price £700) on Mary Shortle's stall at the London International Toy and Doll Fair, Kensington, yesterday. Photograph: Nicola Kurtz.

Blast of warm air is set to break record

As November temperatures soared to an unseasonal mid-18C, weather experts were last night waiting to see if a 100-year-old record will be broken.

Checks at a weather station in Aulheia in Wester Ross, in the north-west of Scotland, revealed a remarkably mild 18.5C (65.3F) at 6am. Forecasters are now waiting to see if the station's highest temperature of the day will break the 18.7C recorded at Addington in Surrey on 16 November 1895.

The average temperature for this time of year ranges from 7C in the north of Scotland to 10-15C on the south coast of England. The mild weather is caused by a blast of warm air sweeping across the Atlantic from hotspots such as the Azores and Bermuda. Weather forecasters expect it to continue well into next week.

British nurses spared beheading

The threat of public beheading has been finally lifted from both British nurses accused of murder in Saudi Arabia. After seven weeks of legal wrangling, the brother of the alleged victim will now be paid £730,000 in "blood money".

The women could be home before the millennium. Frank Gilford, brother of the dead nurse Yvonne Gilford, was accused of piling on the agony yesterday after his lawyers went right to the deadline for filing a petition to waive the death penalty for Deborah Parry and Lucille McLauchlan. Mr Gilford had until today to submit his waiver to the Saudi Sharia court, and he waited until the last possible moment to do it.

Inside Dammam Central Prison, Ms Parry, 38, will have heaved the greatest sigh of relief because she has still to hear the verdict against her. But now she knows that a public beheading cannot take place. Ms McLauchlan has already been sentenced to eight years in prison and 500 lashes.

Mr Gilford, 59, agreed to the waiver weeks ago in return for \$1.2m (£730,000), most of which will pay for a hospital facility in his sister's name. She was stabbed, beaten and suffocated in her room at the King Fahd Military Medical Centre in Dhahran last December. Ms Parry and Ms McLauchlan deny killing her, arguing that confessions - which form the mainstay of the prosecution evidence - were extracted under the threat of sexual and physical violence.

Mr Gilford's lawyers had promised to lodge the waiver twice before - on 22 October and 10 November - but each time they pulled back after disputes with the nurse's Saudi lawyer, Salah Hejailan. Both sides blamed each other for the time taken to finalise the process but Jonathan Ashbee, Ms Parry's brother in law, said: "The deadline was 17 October; I don't think it's any coincidence that he left it until 16 October to lodge the waiver with the court."

"I think he had a fear that the girls would be let off lightly, so he wanted to pile on the agony as long as he could. The pressure on them has been enormous, particularly for Debbie not knowing the verdict against her. The most important thing now is that we clear their names - they are innocent, so even one day in jail is one too many."

Informed legal sources in Saudi Arabia believe the Appeal Court could reduce Ms McLauchlan's sentence to three years and expect Ms Parry to be given no more than four years. It is expected that neither woman will now face the lash and both could be sent home to complete their sentences in England, possibly being free by 2000.

Mr Gilford is expected to receive his money within days. He says he will take only about £50,000 after expenses.

— Steve Boggan

Supermarket bomber may be on film

Detectives are hoping that security cameras may have filmed the "Mardi Gra" bomber during his latest attacks on the Sainsbury's supermarket chain.

Hours of videotapes were being examined yesterday in the hope that they may reveal the identity of the man who planted incendiary bombs at three London stores on Saturday.

One man was slightly injured and a store worker was treated for shock after two of the devices, at Greenford and West Ealing, burst into flames. A third bomb at Sainsbury's in Ruislip was defused by police.

The Mardi Gra bomber - so-called because the devices included a message bearing the words "welcome to the Mardi Gra experience" - first struck in December 1994, when his attentions were directed at Barclays Bank. More than 20 devices were targeted at Barclays until July 1996, when he began threatening Sainsbury's.

— Steve Boggan

Tunnel safety fears raised a year after fire

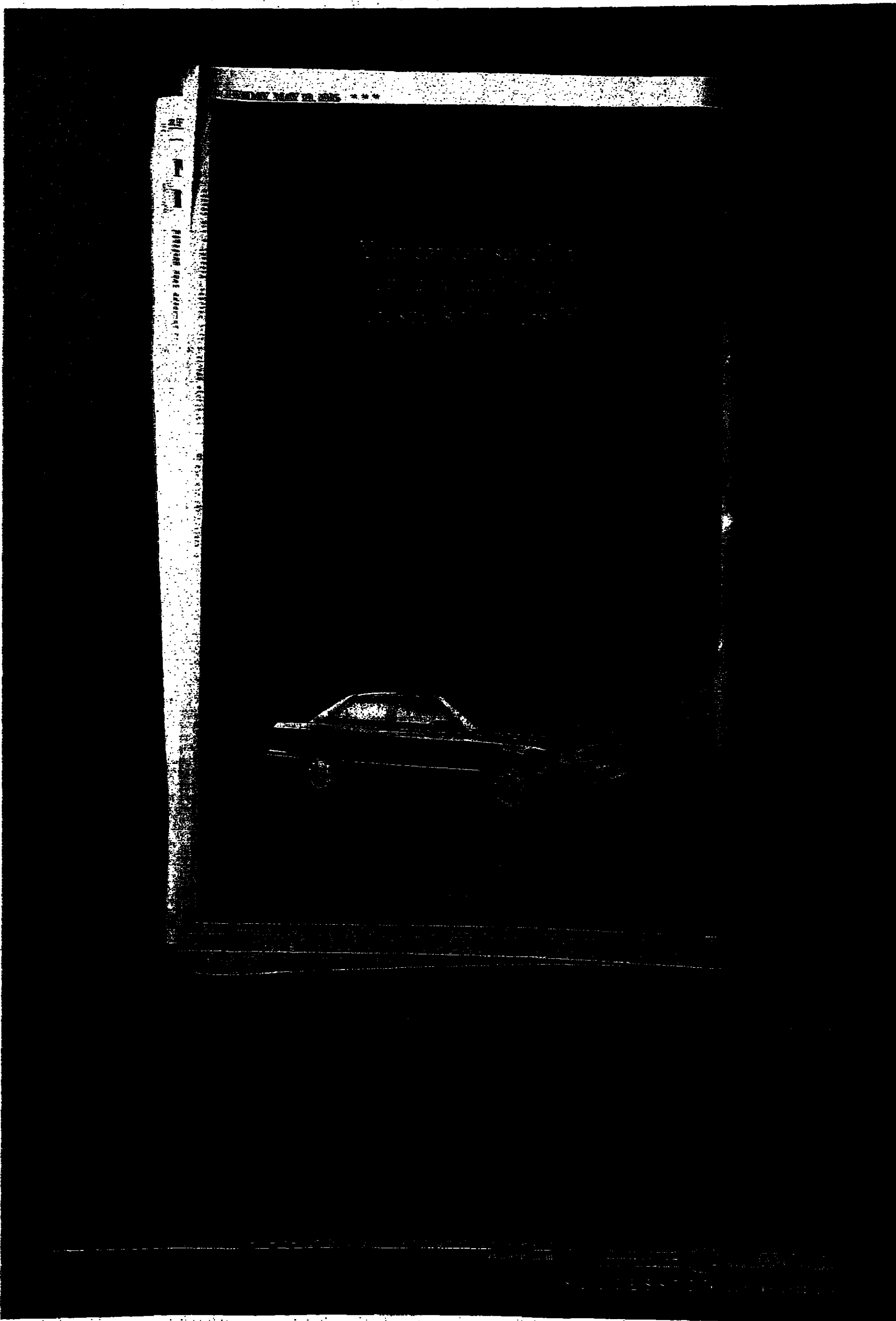
Channel tunnel safety measures are still causing concern one year on from the devastating freight shuttle train fire after which 30 lorry drivers needed hospital treatment, the Consumers' Association said yesterday.

The tunnel operator, Eurotunnel, has introduced additional measures and altered procedures following the fire on 18 November 1996. But the CA said that it was still worried about open-sided freight carriages, evacuation procedures and the non-segregation of passengers from cars on the shuttle trains.

Eurotunnel said it was confident the steps it had taken made the tunnel "even safer than it was before the fire". In May 1997, an official report from the Channel Tunnel Safety Authority made 36 recommendations after saying the fire had exposed "fundamental weaknesses" in safety systems. Yesterday, Eurotunnel said that most of the recommendations had been implemented.

Three share lottery £10m

Last night's National Lottery jackpot of £10m is to be shared by three ticket-holders. The winning numbers were 14, 11, 32, 35, 34 and 23, bonus number 41. A further 38 players, who got five numbers correct plus the bonus ball, will each pick up £74,000.



Britain battles to block new EU currency council

Faced with marginalisation in Europe, Britain will fight today to block plans for an 'economic government' which excludes countries not taking part in the single currency at its launch in 1999. Katherine Butler in Brussels says the Chancellor will challenge France and Germany but may find himself reduced to arguing about who pays for the sandwiches.

Ministers from Britain, Sweden, Denmark and Greece, all of whom are likely to remain outside the Euro-zone in 1999, are challenging proposals to set up a new body, which is being reserved exclusively for finance ministers of governments taking part in Economic and Monetary Union from the start.

Known as "Euro-X", the X standing for the precise number of "ins", the terms of reference for the new council have already been bilaterally agreed between the French and Germans. They will be debated by the 15 EU finance ministers for the first time today when they meet in Brussels.

At the meeting, the Chancellor Gordon Brown will argue strenuously that the regular monthly meetings of all 15 EU finance ministers, which are known as "Ecofin", ought to remain the only decision-making body on economic policy under the terms of the European Union treaty.

Denmark and Sweden, which have signalled they will also opt out of EMU in 1999, will also protest today to being excluded from the new body, because it could take decisions having a direct effect on the economies of the "outs".

The difficulty faced by the so-called "outs" (who insist they ought to be called "pre-ins" because they say they do want to join at a later date), is that they cannot legally veto a decision by a group of EU governments to hold informal meetings outside the framework of the normal EU institutions. Such informal contacts already take place on a regular basis on a wide range of subjects.

Although the new body is "informal" in theory, and has no binding effect, the

big fear about the new elite EMU grouping is that it will "pre-cook" crucial decisions on matters ranging from exchange rate policy, budgets and taxation, to employment and labour strategies before referring them to Ecofin for rubber stamping.

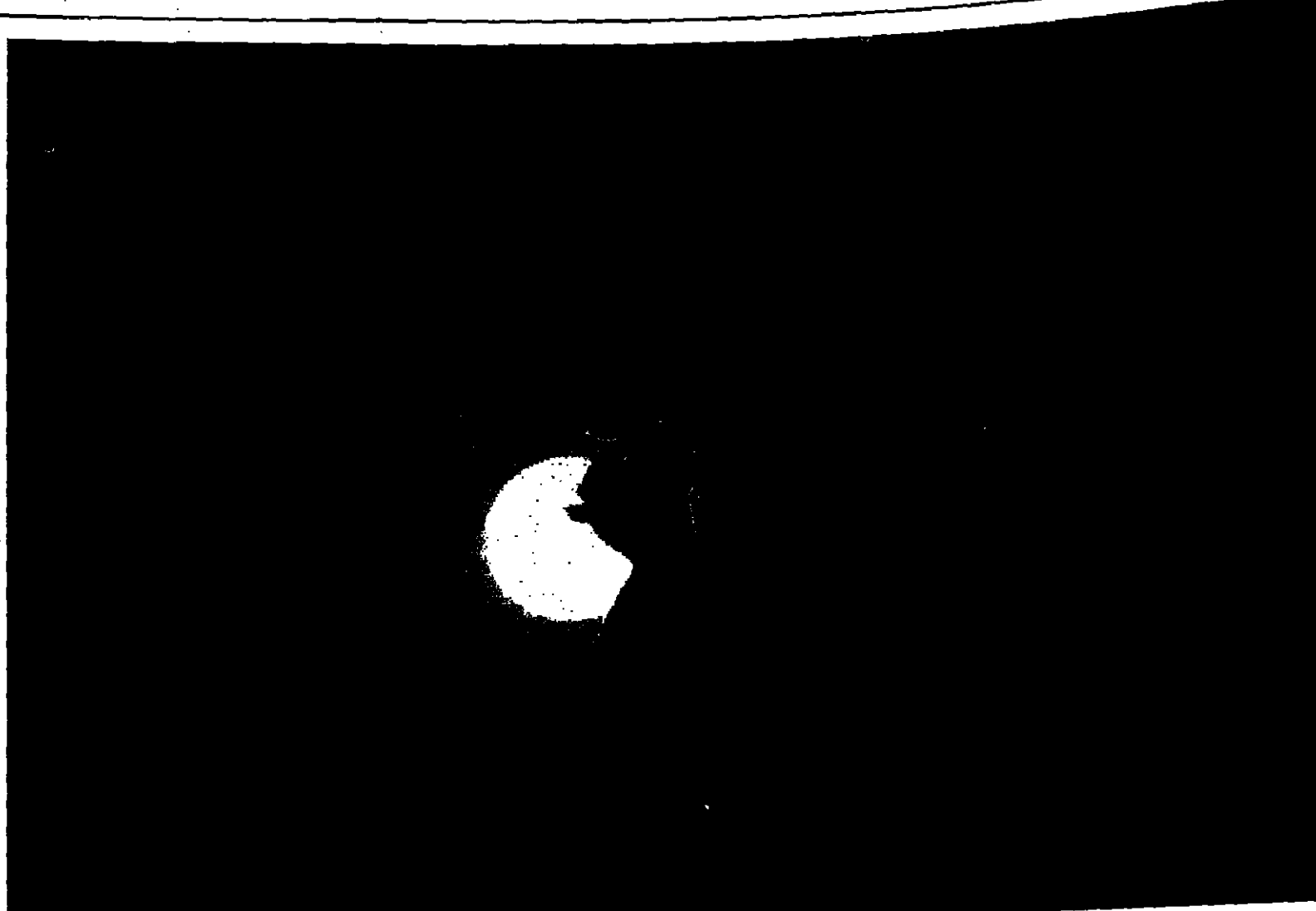
British officials hinted at the weekend that the Government's strategy might be to prevent the use of official EU meeting rooms, complete with heat, light and interpretation facilities, or EU catering facilities, by any informal grouping which excludes certain member states. "I don't see how they could call on the delicious coffee and excellent sandwiches or any other facility paid for out of the EU budget," said a senior British official.

Bonn has indicated it wants the new "council" to be formed on an inter-governmental basis which would not alter the status of Ecofin's monthly meetings. If the Euro-X is indeed this informal, in legal terms, then Mr Brown seems powerless to do anything other than make life difficult by ordering his "in" colleagues to take themselves off to a local hotel for their monthly talks.

Behind the scenes Britain has unsuccessfully been lobbying for observer status on the Euro-X. French officials repeated at the weekend that they believe giving the "outs" even an observer seat is "out of the question". It would be "absurd" and "impracticable", they said.

But the French also admit they want a "legal framework" for the Euro-X to be agreed by EU heads of government in December. This would obviously require British agreement. Gordon Brown's glimmer of hope must be that to overcome a British veto, some form of "bridging mechanism" which would allow him to claim the Government is not being shut out completely, could eventually emerge as the compromise.

Britain may also try to take advantage of the fears of some of the smaller "in" governments who are lobbying to have the European Commission officially represented on the Euro-X. Some believe that Commission involvement would balance the domination of the French and Germans but Bonn and Paris are anxious to see this limited to ad hoc attendance by EU commissioners.



Desert nights: A nomad offering his camels food at the Pushkar cattle fair in the Indian desert state of Rajasthan. The fair at the weekend attracted nearly 50,000 people to buy and sell camels and celebrate the full moon. Photograph: Reuters/Kamal Kishore

Hungarians vote on Nato

Hungary's government yesterday said it was confident of a positive outcome to a referendum on Nato membership.

The referendum will be valid if half the 8 million eligible voters show up, or there are at least 2 million votes for or against Nato membership. The highest turnout was in Budapest, with almost 41 per cent. Opinion polls found a substantial majority of Hungarians in favour of joining Nato in a first round of expansion of the Western military alliance in 1999.

— Reuters, Budapest

South Africa's big firms oppose tax on past profits

South African companies are being asked to pay for the past in the form of a wealth tax or training levy, following a three-day hearing at which business was called to account for its part in apartheid.

If the special Truth and Reconciliation Commission hearings — marked by a disappointing stream of qualified apologies from the corporate sector — are anything to go by, few businesses are likely to throw open willingly their coffers.

Archbishop Desmond Tutu, TRC chairman, opened the hearings by singling out the Shell and BP oil companies for criticism because they failed to make individual submissions. "No one today admits to supporting apartheid," said the archbishop. Trade union leader Sam Shilowa wryly said, it seemed everyone was a freedom fighter now.

The biggest corporations insisted they had long opposed apartheid, although some admitted they had not always done all they could. Some, like Anglo American and the Chamber of Mines, even suggested that business had been an apartheid victim, as the system reduced growth rates and barred South African companies from the international market. Johan Rupert, son of Anton Rupert, founder of Rembrandt, the largest Afrikaner business group, said he failed to understand how his company had benefited from apartheid.

At the end of the hearings

Koosum Kalyan, Shell SA's general manager, said no one from Shell had testified at the TRC hearings in Johannesburg because they were not invited to do so.

The archbishop's public criticism suggests behind-the-scenes tensions between the Commission and the oil multinationals, but Ms Kalyan said Shell had been told it could still lodge a written submission before 16 December and discussions with the TRC were ongoing.

Ms Kalyan said that while Shell was already heavily involved in South Africa's transformation, the company would consider contributing to a special reparations fund for apartheid victims.

Since President Nelson Mandela took power an informal system of compensation has been in operation. The President, who has made friends with white business leaders, regularly invites corporate giants to fund and build clinics and schools bearing their names. It would be a short-sighted captain of industry who turned down the opportunity of speedy rehabilitation.

But newspaper editors, academics and trade unionists are asking for a more systematic approach to compensation.

Samuel Terreblanche, an economist at the Afrikaans University, Stellenbosch, is suggesting a wealth tax be levied on individuals with assets exceeding R2m (£250,000).

— Mary Braid

Boutros-Ghali elected head of Francophone nations

Boutros Boutros-Ghali was elected head of La Francophonie, the French-speaking nations, yesterday. Mr Boutros-Ghali was approved unanimously to the newly created position of secretary-general of the 49-member grouping, which is seen by many as a guardian against domination by the Anglo-Saxon language and influences. He stepped down as United Nations secretary-general at the end of his term last year after the United States made it clear it would not support him for a further term of office.

— Reuters, Hanoi



Holocaust award

The Holocaust survivor Riva Sifere (left), from Latvia, will tomorrow become the first person to receive compensation from the Swiss Fund for Needy Victims of the Holocaust and World Jewish Restitution Organisation.

Nazi gold, page 15
— Reuters, Riga

Communist leader dies

Georges Marchais, Stalinist leader of the French Communist Party for 22 years, died in a Paris hospital yesterday, aged 77. He had a long history of heart disease. When Mr Marchais became leader of the PCF in 1972, it was France's biggest opposition party, winning one out of every four votes in national elections. By the time he stepped down in January 1994, its share had fallen to 7 per cent as the Soviet communism that had inspired Marchais was swept away.

Obituary, page 16
— Reuters, Paris

New name, same regime

Burma's new military regime has a friendlier name, but will the leaders change in their deeds? On Saturday, Burma's four top generals announced they had dissolved the State Law and Order Restoration Council and replaced it with the State Peace and Development Council. "We hope there is a change of heart and thinking also, but it is too early to make a judgement," said Tin Oo, vice-chairman of the National League for Democracy, the party of which Nobel laureate Aung San Suu Kyi is also a top official.

— AP, Rangoon

Italy fears for the life of its great eccentric

He is Italy's best-known social campaigner. But now Marco Pannella (right) may be fighting his last battle. Undaunted by a stroke a week ago, he has gone on hunger strike to protest at his lack of exposure on the Italian media. Andrew Gumbel in Rome explains the extraordinary response to Mr Pannella's gamble with his health.



Marco Pannella is a man who has long devoted body and soul to political causes. In the Seventies, his Radical Party forced divorce and abortion onto the Italian statute books. More recently he has willingly allowed himself to be stung in jail for distributing hashish on the streets, all in the name of decriminalising the market in soft drugs.

Ask most Italians about him and they will say he has gone a bit soft himself. He certainly

does not attract much in the way of voter support these days. But his decision to stop eating so soon after suffering a brain haemorrhage has made Italy rally to the defence of one of its great eccentrics.

Party leader after party leader, the establishment has spent the weekend begging him to give up his gesture. The Prime Minister, Romano Prodi, phoned him on Saturday and even acknowledged he was right

to say he was being ignored by the major television networks. The chairman of the parliamentary media commission invited him to make his feelings formally known this morning — preferably on a full stomach.

But Mr Pannella has decided that he will not be fobbed off. He has agreed to continue taking liquids and even checked himself into hospital to have his metabolism monitored. But no food has passed his lips since midnight on Friday. And 300 diehard supporters have since joined his hunger strike in sympathy.

In a country of molly-coddled politicians and largely molly-coddled voters, Mr Pannella's willingness to take real risks comes as a breath of fresh air. Whether his own media exposure is an issue worth gambling his life for is another matter. As the canny old man of post-war Christian Democracy, Giulio Andreotti, wrote to him over the weekend: "You can't run any campaigns when you are dead."

Mr Pannella's big political innovation was to exploit the fine print of the Italian constitution

to call referendums by public acclaim and so bypass an efficient and corrupt parliament. Since the early Seventies he has been gathering hundreds of thousands of signatures to force plebiscites on everything from divorce and abortion to hunting, shooting and fishing.

He lost his edge in the 1987 general elections, when he allowed the pornography actress La Cicciolina to run on his party's list as a way of illustrating the bankruptcy of Italian democracy. La Cicciolina was elected, and proceeded to embarrass everyone — Mr Pannella included — by stripping in public at every opportunity.

In recent years, Mr Pannella has called so many referendums — many of them abstruse and incomprehensible — that the tactic has outlived its usefulness. Despite waning support, his knack for arresting campaigns has continued: in the last few weeks he has taken to the streets to distribute both marijuana and big banknotes — the latter a protest against the big state subsidies enjoyed by political parties, including his own.

1997 'Top Direct Lender Over Two Years' - What Mortgage Magazine.

What kind of mortgage did Watchdog recommend?

The only kind we provide.

Lender	APR (Variable)	Monthly Repayment (after tax relief)	Cost of Mortgage (after tax relief)
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HALIFAX	5.0%	£417.00	£10,400.00
ALLIANCE & LEICESTER	5.0%	£417.00	£10,400.00
DIRECT LINE	5.0%	£417.00	£10,400.00

Recently, the BBC's Watchdog programme disclosed some worrying news for many home owners. One of the programme's main findings was that many borrowers pay more than they need to because their lenders charge interest for the whole year on the amount owed at the start of the year, rather than on the balance as it reduces with each payment.

You'll be pleased to hear then that unlike the majority of lenders, Direct Line calculates interest daily, not annually. Combine this saving with a low, standard variable rate and you could save almost £50* per month on an £80,000 mortgage over 25 years. (As shown in the table.) But that's not all:

- If you transfer your mortgage, without moving house, we'll pay your legal fees*.
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You must be aged 18 years or over, subject to some restrictions, and have a regular income. Your mortgage must be secured on a property in the UK. Direct Line will not lend more than £100,000. Direct Line will pay the excess up to a maximum of £100,000. Other fees may be charged. *Legal fees will be refunded when the mortgage is set up. †Valuation subject to payment of a fee to the valuer. ††Insurance transferred. †††The guaranteed insurance, noting only applies if your current insurance is arranged with your lender, and is not a normal underwriting policy and corresponding level of cover. Calls recorded and randomly monitored. Direct Line cannot be held responsible for any loss or damage arising from the use of the information provided. Direct Line cannot be held responsible for any loss or damage arising from the use of the information provided. YOUR HOME IS AT RISK IF YOU DO NOT KEEP UP PAYMENTS ON A MORTGAGE OR OTHER LOAN SECURED ON IT.

Peking
fearless
free at

China's best-known
dissident arrived in the
United States yesterday
after being freed from
jail on health grounds
and sent into exile.
For in Peking says the
Chinese Government is
typically using its
political prisoners as
diplomatic bargaining
counters.

Peking's most fearless critic set free after 18 years

China's best-known dissident arrived in the United States yesterday after being freed from jail on health grounds and sent into exile. Teresa Poole in Peking says the Chinese government is cynically using its political prisoners as diplomatic bartering counters.

Wei Jingsheng, who since March 1979 has spent only six months outside prison, arrived in Detroit on the first airplane flight of his life. He was freed from a salt works labour camp near Peking on Saturday night, and allowed to spend five hours with his family before boarding the plane and flying off into reluctant exile. Chinese officials told him that if he returned to China, he would go back to jail. Wei's health - like that of many other Chinese political prisoners - has been ruined by prison. He suffers from neck pains, heart problems and high blood pressure, and he needs to supplement his breathing with oxygen. "He used to need one tank of oxygen each week, but now it's one tank every three days," said his brother, Wei Xiaotao. Since last year, the dissident had been kept under 24-hour watch in a cell with two glass walls and a light which was never switched off, said his sister, Wei Ling.

Most of his years in prison have been spent in solitary confinement. When he was paroled in 1993, he emerged much thinner and with only half his teeth. Photographs taken yesterday by the Wei family showed him looking chubbier.

Wei has become the most prominent international symbol of repression in China. A former electrician at Peking Zoo, he helped launch the 1978 Democracy Wall campaign, and was one of the founders of the modern dissident movement in China, although he remains relatively obscure within his own country.

After nearly two decades incarcerated in Chinese labour

camps and jails, the 47-year-old pro-democracy activist's spirit does not seem to have been broken. "He is firm and unshakeable. No situation would make him give up his pursuit and ideals," Wei Ling said. "He thinks the sacrifices he has made for a just cause are worthwhile." His brother described him as being "in high spirits". He was in prison from March 1979 until his parole four years ago, and then detained again in April 1994 and subsequently sentenced for 14 years for trying to "subvert" the government.

Human rights groups in the West welcomed the release, but stressed it did not represent any easing on political freedoms inside China. A spokesman for Amnesty International said: "On the one hand he is free, on the other he is forced into exile. This fits the pattern of China getting rid of its dissidents without allowing the internal space for dissent."

Wei, who has been nominated repeatedly for a Nobel prize, owes his freedom to last month's state visit by President Jiang Zemin to the United States. The Americans were disappointed that Peking had offered no human rights gestures in the run-up to the presidential summit. The state visit passed off relatively smoothly but by the time Mr Jiang left the US he was aware something might be necessary to cement Washington's policy of "constructive engagement" and ensure no delays in the promised return visit next year of Mr Clinton to Peking. The release of Wei is the opening gambit.

It is not the first time Wei has been used as a pawn in international relations. In September 1993, after serving all but six months of a 15-year sentence for "counter-revolutionary" crimes, Wei was paroled in the hope that his early release might swing votes in favour of Peking's bid to host the 2000 Olympics. Other dissidents have been released in recent years as Peking lobbied for renewal of its Most Favoured Nation trading status by Washington.

US diplomats now hope other dissidents may be

released as preparations are made for Mr Clinton's return visit. The most high-profile detainee still in prison is now Wang Dan, the 28-year-old former leader of the student-led pro-democracy demonstrations in 1989. He spent four years in prison for that "crime" and continued to campaign for political change on his release. Last year he was jailed for 11 years for subversion. The New York-based Human Rights in China urged Mr Clinton to make the release of a group of 27 Chinese and Tibetan dissidents a condition of his visiting China next year.



Free at last: Wei Jingsheng, after a brief release in 1993. Now President Clinton says he would like to meet him

Photograph: Reuters



Molly was born prematurely and as a result was slow to develop. Her early learning difficulties resulted in her becoming frustrated and angry. Her parents were at a loss to know how to deal with her frequent tantrums and bad behaviour.

Barnardo's pre-school centre helped Molly with individual speech therapy sessions and group activities, where she learned to express how she felt and to play with other children. But helping Molly was only half of the solution. Her parents were also counselled on how to encourage Molly's development at home, and importantly - how to diffuse any explosive tantrums. Support from Barnardo's meant that Molly's parents felt happy for her

OFTEN THE FIRST PRIORITY IN CHILD CARE IS HELPING THE PARENTS

to start at a mainstream school, and Molly had the confidence to successfully make new friends. Molly's case isn't unique. Often, the best way to make sure a child has the chance of a happy childhood, is to give help and support to the family. We do this through counselling, support groups and local projects.

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Based on real cases, with names and photographs changed to guarantee anonymity.

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VICTIM OF DENG'S WRATH

It is almost exactly 19 years since Wei Jingsheng emerged as an unlikely proponent of political change in China. When the "big character posters" started to appear in Peking at the end of 1978 in the short-lived "Democracy Wall" movement, the contributions from Wei were among the most outspoken. "We want no more gods and emperors, no more saviours of any kind," he wrote. "Democracy, freedom and happiness are the only goals of modernisation."

Wei launched a magazine to advocate what he called the "Fifth Modernisation" - democracy - a blunt rebuke to the Four Modernisations of Deng Xiaoping, the architect of China's ambitious reform programme. The young firebrand did not mince his words: "The people must have the power to replace their representatives at any time so that these representatives cannot go on deceiving others in the name of the people," he wrote.

For a few months, Deng tolerated the Democracy Wall activists as a useful weapon against the diehard Maoists who had brought China to near ruin in the 1966-76 Cultural Revolution. But Deng's subsequent crack-down on freedom of expression was just as sudden as the brief flowering of dissent. As the posters were torn down, Wei's final appeal pitched him against the most powerful man in China.

"The people must maintain vigilance against Deng Xiaoping's metamorphosis into an autocrat," he wrote. In March 1979 he was arrested and sentenced to 15 years in jail for "counter-rev-

olutionary" activities. Deng was said to have insisted there should be no leniency.

Neither Wei's family background nor his personal experiences before 1978 fully explain the source for his unwavering belief in Western democratic values and his stubborn refusal not to bow before the cruel might of the Chinese system.

Wei was born in 1950, into a family of Mao loyalists in the central Anhui province. He belonged to the generation whose education was wrecked by the Cultural Revolution, playing his part first as a Red Guard, then as one of the radical youths sent to work in the countryside. Finally he joined the People's Liberation Army. In 1973 he was demobilised and worked as an electrician at Peking Zoo.

When he was first released in 1993, Wei found that China had changed enormously and most Chinese were more interested in business than politics. The government tried to win over the country's most single-minded dissident, but Wei continued to call, via the foreign media, for political reform and human rights.

His decision to meet John Shattuck, a senior US government human rights official, brought his new-found freedom to an end. Soon after the meeting in April 1994 Wei was detained, and the following year he was sentenced to 14 years jail for conspiring to subvert the government.

Wei always said he did not want to be sent into exile and the present Chinese government has no intention of ever letting Wei return.

— Teresa Poole

10/EDUCATION

The £26,000 saving to make a child go 34 miles to school



Two's company: Highland teacher Mary Harris with her only pupil, nine-year-old Eileen Grant

Nine-year-old Eileen Grant may be the most expensive pupil in Britain's state schooling system. Highland Council fears it cannot afford the £26,267 a year it costs to teach her in the remote school where she is the only pupil. Louise Jury looks at the youngster's options.

Eileen Grant lives with her parents, Isabel and Arthur, on a remote Scottish estate where Mr Grant is the head keeper. The local shops and doctor are 35 miles away in Helmsdale, which is the nearest village. The mail is delivered twice a week.

For the past five years, Eileen has been taught by Mary Harris at Loch Choir primary

school where she is the only pupil.

But last week Highland Council put the fate of the school on a list of 10 which face closure as it endeavours to find savings of £14m. Councils throughout Britain face the dilemma of whether they can afford to keep open small schools much valued by their local communities. In England recently a proposal by Warwickshire to close many small rural schools was fiercely contested by parents.

Highland Council's education department is £1.6m over budget for this financial year alone. The closure idea has to go out to consultation but the option for Eileen if it goes ahead would be a 17-mile journey to the neighbouring primary school of Kinbrace.

Isabel Grant, 49, said they had lived in their cottage for 21 years and the area needed peo-

ple like them to carry on working in places others might shun as inhospitable.

They would be very worried for Eileen if she had to move schools to Kinbrace, particularly in the winter months when they were frequently cut off by snow drifts.

There were no other children left in the area, which lies more than 100 miles from Inverness, and in two years' time Eileen will be leaving to board at secondary school 50 miles away. "Couldn't they wait until then?" she said.

Mary Harris knows the hazards of bad weather. The Loch Choir estate owners have provided a cottage where she stays when the weather is too bad for her to do the 70-mile round trip home to Helmsdale.

She would not comment on the council's plans but said 17 miles was clearly a long way for a primary aged pupil to go to

school. And it is that distance which might prove the sticking point for the plan.

Council spokesman Gordon Fyfe said Loch Choir primary was the only school with a single pupil, although several on the possible hit list were very small.

Providing a teacher and paying heating and book bills brought the cost of educating Eileen to £26,267, against an average of £1,600 to £1,700 per pupil a year in the Highlands, the most remote mainland region in Europe.

But if the council agreed Loch Choir should close, there will be one more hope for Eileen - the Secretary of State for Scotland, Donald Dewar.

"Seventeen miles exceeds the normal limit so the decision would have to go to the Scottish Secretary," Mr Fyfe said. If the whole process took long enough, Eileen Grant could be a boarder by then anyway.



Stepping out: Eileen could face 34-mile round trip to attend another school Photographs: Peter Jolly/Northpix

How to b... in six (no

Helena Bonham Carter...
wanted to look the part...
for the Lord...
premiere of her new...
film 'The Wings of the Dove' on Wednesday...
the transformation...
Photographs by...
Alan Easton

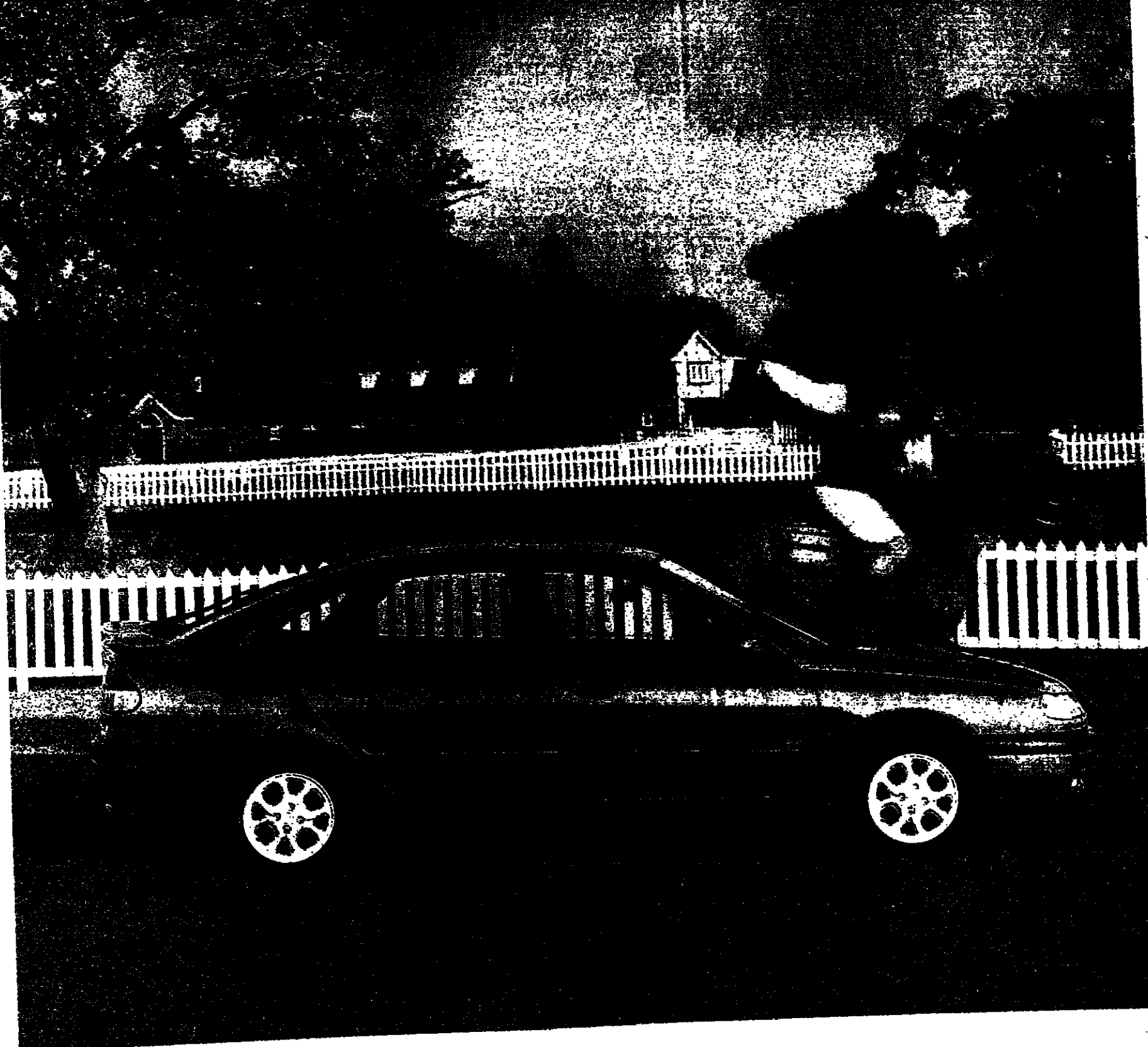


Helena Bonham Carter...
wanted to look the part...
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film 'The Wings of the Dove' on Wednesday...
the transformation...
Photographs by...
Alan Easton



She takes her last...
as the ship is forced to land

SOME SPORTS ARE EASIER TO GET INTO THAN OTHERS



Try walking into any polo club (however modest) and asking if you can have a bit of a knock around. No chance. Even golf clubs these days have a waiting list longer than most people's best tee shot.

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11/FASHION



Helena Bonham Carter arrives at the Dorchester to be made into a movie star for the night

How to become a movie star in six (not so) easy steps

Helena Bonham Carter wanted to look the part for the London premiere of her new film *'The Wings of the Dove'* on Wednesday. Tamsin Blanchard watched the transformation. Photographs by Jillian Edelstein

4pm The Dorchester Hotel. Helena Bonham Carter, movie star and street urchin, is swigging water from a bottle of Evian, wandering from room to room in the palatial suite that is to be her dressing-room for the evening. She is wearing a pair of baggy trousers held on to her tiny frame by braces, an old jersey top and a pair of grubby white trainers. Her hair

is sticking up all over the place and her finely-boned porcelain-pale face is without a single trace of make-up. She smokes in between mouthfuls of water. "Let's see if it fits before we start," says Helena, stripping down to practical big knickers and a grey Calvin Klein sports-bra. She unzips the pink-edged clothes hanging bag to reveal a candy-pink taffeta corset top

and long fish-tail skirt made specially for the star's London Film Festival premiere of her new film, *The Wings of the Dove*. Across the gold Vivienne Westwood label is another narrow label with the word "special" embroidered in gold thread.

Westwood's business in providing celebrities with gowns to wear to one-off events is growing. She dressed Elizabeth Shue for *Leaving Las Vegas*, and made another pink confection for Kate Winslet to wear to the Academy Awards earlier in the year.

Helena is tiny, but despite a fitting two days earlier, the skirt and top are even smaller. The dress was made in just 48 hours. It looks as though some good old-fashioned knee-in-the-small-of-the-back techniques are in order. But then Helena is used to being squeezed into corsetry. She is also used to being dressed completely out of keeping with her own character. Her personal style is famously scruffy. She usually wears just "a bit of make-up with some zit cover-up", and is more interested in comfort than fashion.

Tonight she has just another role to play: "I'm dressing up and pretending to be a movie star," she says. Her comfy clothes will be stuffed into a plastic bag until the morning. The dress, with its *décolletage* neckline, impossibly small waist and Marilyn style fish-tail skirt with ruffles of glittery net underskirts is pure Hollywood glamour and just the thing. "I'm not imately glamorous. If it was left up to me, I would never choose to wear a dress like this. But this is fantasy time." 4.50pm Make-up artist Louise Constad sets to work while Helena sneaks another cigarette. Constad is a make-up artist to the stars and has covered spots and brushed powder on almost any celebrity you can name, from Faye Dunaway to Tina Turner.

"What a palaver," laughs Helena at the prospect of three hours of primping and preening. She might as well be back on the set of a movie, where she spends lots of time with make-up artists. "You both have to share a sense of humour and a taste in music because you

have to spend a lot of time together - I like show tunes," she says. For *Wings*, Helena spent a total of 10 weeks between hair and make-up filming in London and Venice, where she spent most of the time feeling seasick from too many takes in a moonlit gondola.

Slowly, Helena's public face takes shape. Her eyes are dusted with dark blue shadow and a touch of sparkly glitter and her eyelashes grow thicker and longer with each wave of the mascara wand.

5.55pm "She's not a hairdresser at all: she's going to make a dress now." Helena's regular hairdresser Carol Hemmings is rummaging in a dressing-up box full of velvet flowers, threads of beads, feathers and ribbons. She pulls out a length of pink velvet ribbon, some seed pearls and a needle and thread.

She then sets to work sewing short pieces of hair into Helena's own hair. It looks painful. "All that long hair I'm supposed to have, it's actually in Carol's box," says Helena, blue varnish being applied to her nails. The hair-pieces are trimmed to fit in with Helena's own and the tiny pearls are threaded on to single strands.

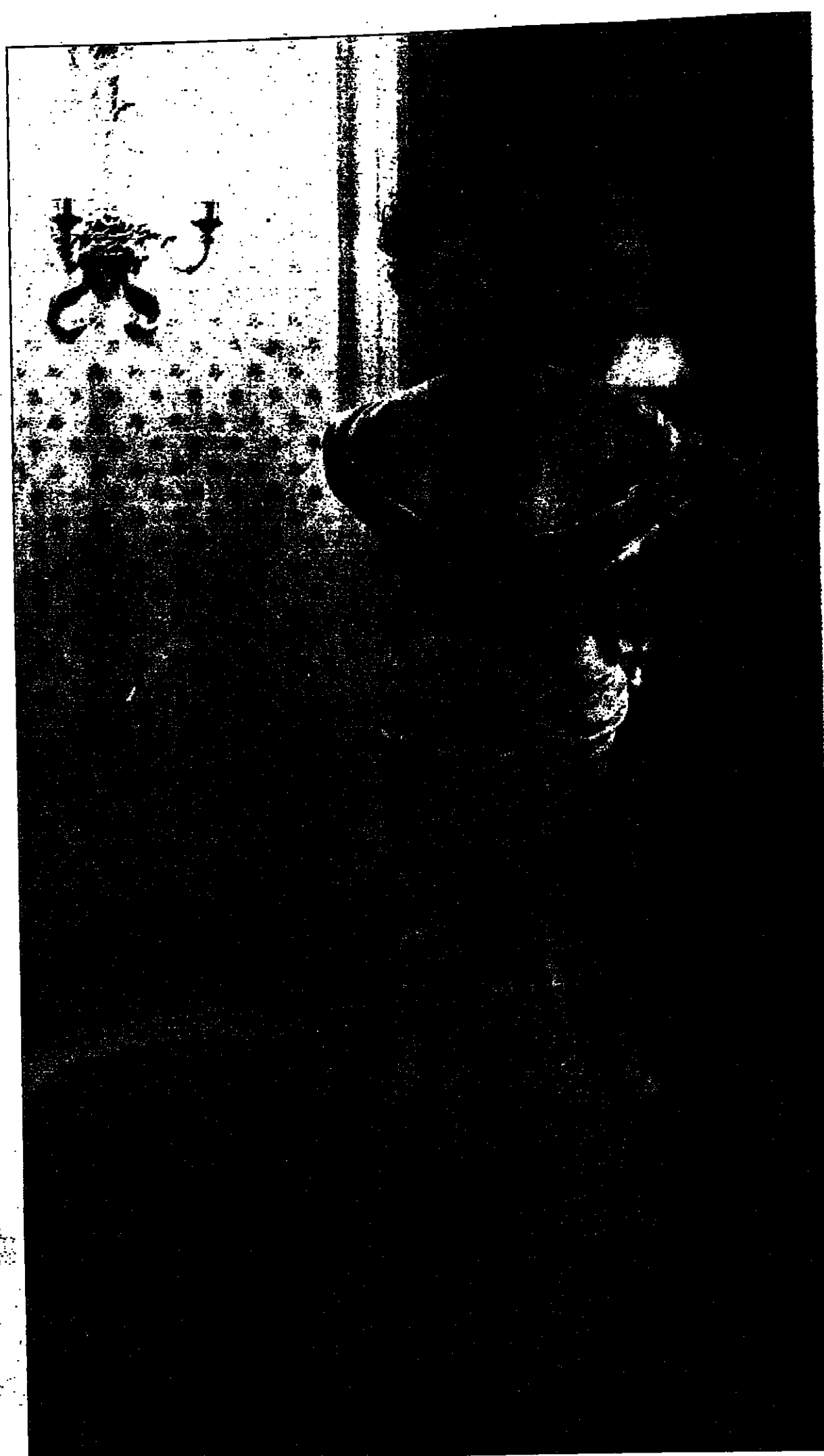
6.15pm "Hello my angel!" Helena's innately glamorous silver-haired mum, Elena, arrives to escort her to the premiere. She's already seen the film twice. She is dressed in a plum taffeta jacket and skirt made to her own design. Underneath, she is wearing a white ruffled blouse she picked up in Madrid. The suit, she says, is an

old faithful. She has worn it to many a premiere.

7.40pm Hair and make-up done, it's time to get dressed. Helena breathes her last free breath for the night and the zip is forced closed. As she looks in the mirror and sees Helena the movie star, there is a ping. "I think something's gone," she cringes. "It might be your vertebrae," jokes Louise. The zip has broken but, thankfully, the buttons hold the corset together. Mum takes a needle and thread just in case and they step out into the cold night, the autograph hunters and the waiting limousine.

"Did she give you an autograph?" asks an onlooker. "No," I reply. "But doesn't she look fabulous?"

'The Wings of the Dove' opens 2 January 1998 nationwide



Ready for the big night. The transformation from street urchin to glamorous movie star is complete, thanks to three hours of hair and make-up and a pink taffeta evening gown made especially by Vivienne Westwood



Make-up artist Louise Constad dusts Helena's eyes with a glittery blue shadow



Her hair is made to look thicker than it really is with the aid of a few hair-pieces



She takes her last free breath of the night as the zip is forced closed



No pain, no gain. Corset on, Helena needs help to put on her own shoes



The actress as Kate Croy in *'The Wings of the Dove'*

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Salsa: apart from the groping, it's perfect for single women

"It's perfect," says Caroline, 30, who dances lambada and salsa about three times a week. "It means I can go out any evening I like, on my own, enjoy myself, and keep fit at the same time."

She is talking about Latin American dancing, which has taken off big time in London during the last three years, providing single women with a hobby they can pursue independently of companions, male or female. However, women who salsa are complaining about the number of men attracted by the perfect groping opportunity, regarding women who dance Latin as easy targets for, at a minimum, a night's fondling.

At one bar in North London several months ago, three friends and I had an extremely unpleasant experience. As we sat down a group of men began pestering us to dance. Two gave in, believing if we danced with

So we briefed security to stamp on it and ask women who were dancing with groppers if they were OK. Some women like it, you can't deny that - but most don't. We've changed the lighting to make it less seedy and any pests are thrown out instantly."

Bar Lorca was previously run by Spanish men, and Ms McNulty says that a female boss and a gay male deputy have helped change the culture. She also says a lot of the groppers are foreign men who have a different moral and sexual code and misread the signals the often-scantly clad dancers are sending out.

The Bar Madrid in the West End of London has gone through phases of letting only couples and single women in after complaints about groping. The obvious advantage to the men with wandering hands, of course, is that if challenged they can insist any erotic movements or gestures are simply part of the dance.

Caroline, who dances salsa and lambada, says you can spot men whose interest is not in the dancing a mile off. "Salsa dancers are usually student types and they don't drink, while the groppers prop up the bar, and they tend not to be English. I hate it when they grab you close, and it hurts your back as well. I always wear trousers instead of little skirts, and I know who the groppers are now because I go to the clubs so often, so I just say no. I don't want to intimidate guys who are beginners, but if they start grabbing I'll push them away."

Perhaps these men assume we too are only after one thing. I found myself thinking, is it my dress, my shoes, what? I don't go to trendy nightclubs these days, as I'm 38 and tend to feel too much like someone's mum, but I'm sure if I did I wouldn't have to worry about a skirt being too short or heels too high.

them once, they would leave us alone. My partner began dancing much closer than even the salsa required, and when his hands moved onto my bum after 40 seconds I extricated myself from his embrace and made it back to the table before noticing my friend in difficulty with a small dark man who had his knee between her legs as he bent her over backwards, clearly regarding the whole business as a sort of pre-mating ritual.

Sexual harassment being rather bad for business, the Bar Lorca went into receivership when single women stopped going, before appointing Frances McNulty who had previously run a grope-free club in Islington. McNulty said: "It was vile when I came here. I thought, I can't believe this."

BY LYNNE WALLIS



Coming out: After two years of distribution to a select mailing list, the Erotic Print Society Review is made available in newsagents. Courtesy of The Erotic Print Society

Artful eroticism for the discerning (and older) gent

A magazine devoted to the erotic and aimed at the more mature reader is to be put on sale to the public for the first time next week. It may be raunchy but, says Steve Boggan, it's all in the best possible taste.

They remember adolescent fumbles during the blitz and hanker for the days of innocent pranks at Oxford in the 1930s. They probably read the *Daily Telegraph* and frequent London's best gentlemen's clubs.

But this week these top drawer chaps find themselves the target of a new magazine more likely to be found on the top shelf. The *Erotic Print Society Review* is coming out. After two years of distribution to a select mailing list, the magazine will be available to the public. It will depict explicit sexual frolics and contain the fantasies of some of the country's top writers but it isn't pornography - and that's official.

"We've even had policemen friends look at our stuff and we have a letter from the Customs and Excise saying they regard it as art," said the *Review's* editor, Rowan Mackinnon, 29.

The reason is simple. The magazine is an offshoot of the Erotic Print Society founded four years ago by Old Etonian James Maclean, and it contains only artwork and writing. In its nine previous subscription-only appearances, there has been only one photograph. And that was from the 19th century. Instead, there are paintings and drawings from 18th- and 19th-century artists such as Thomas Rowlandson and Aubrey Beardsley. Their work is among the prints now sold by Mr Maclean, 48, to a mailing list of 30,000 clients.

Two years ago, Mr Maclean began updating his buyers with a free quarterly newsletter. It was so good that some clients began sending in money, believing it couldn't possibly be free.

Top writers and humourists such as Auberon Waugh, Joscelyn Dimbleby and Barry Humphries have been persuaded to reveal their deepest fantasies for the price of a free lunch and a complimentary print. In one edition, the novelist Anne Billson described how she would like to be wrapped in clingfilm while, naked except for a pair of "vertiginous" stilettos, the entire string quartet of an orchestra made love to her.

From next week, Ms Mackinnon is hoping to distribute the magazine from amenable newsagents in London and at members-only clubs such as Black's, the Chelsea Arts Club and the Cobden Working Men's Club.

"We feel there is a market out there for men aged between 40 and 75 who haven't lost interest in sex but don't like the way it is presented these days," she said. "They hanker after gentler, more innocent and erotic times."

"It's all a bit haphazard at the moment because we're such a small operation, but I used to work as a dogbody at *Private Eye* and that made me realise that something can work if the people involved truly love what they're doing."

The 24-page first public edition, priced at £1, has a print run of 12,000 but Mr Maclean hopes it will grow in popularity. "We've been amazed at the success of the *Review* when it was essentially only a newsletter," he said. "The standard of people we have been able to get to write for us has been amazing, but I think people realise that it's all very tasteful."

Nevertheless, some of the illustrations are a little strong for some people's tastes, so newsagents may have a problem in deciding where to stock it. "We don't regard ourselves as a top shelf magazine and our front covers are always very tame," said Mr Maclean. "Mind you, the back page is a different story - lots of adverts for our prints, and they're a bit raunchy. So it could be a bit of a problem. It might end up on the top shelf after all."

Out on the oil prospecting frontier, it's a struggle to stay clean, and green

Should Britain cease offshore oil exploration to help prevent global warming? As Greenpeace complete a 250,000-signature petition demanding a halt, Environment Correspondent Nicholas Schoon visits the deep waters of the Atlantic frontier.

It takes two hours of shuddering, noisy helicopter flight from Aberdeen to reach the Sedco Sovereign Explorer, contracted by US company Conoco to drill a well in water 2,500 ft deep. Here, 100 miles north of the Outer Hebrides, is the edge of the Continental Shelf, where the shallower under-sea planes of Europe begin to fall away into the Atlantic's abyss. The depth of water, storms and huge waves also put it on the edge of what is possible for exploiting any oil below the sea bed.

Greenpeace says the oil men should not be here at all. Its first line of argument is that oil and gas reserves sufficient to cause disastrous changes in climate and sea level have already been found around the world, so the hunt for more must stop while efforts to develop non-polluting alternatives must intensify. Its second is that the extreme conditions on the frontier make the risks of a life-damaging spillage too high.

But BP and Shell have already found oil on the frontier and 24 other companies, including Conoco, have government licences to explore and exploit any fields they find. This region is the great hope for the future of Britain's offshore industry; it could keep thousands of jobs and big export revenues far into the next century as North Sea oil and gas runs down.

This summer Greenpeace made its point by occupying Rockall, a tiny isolated rock far out in the Atlantic, for several weeks. Then it attached the survival pod its activists had sheltered in to a BP exploration rig on the frontier for several days. It also obstructed the work of

seismic boats which shoot sound waves into the rock strata below the sea bed in a search for potentially oil-bearing formations. And it fought and lost a court case in which it alleged that the Government had failed to comply with EU nature conservation laws when it granted oil companies their frontier licences.

All of this hectic and expensive campaigning in the run-up to the Kyoto Climate Summit next month has had little noticeable effect on the new Government. Tony Blair, the Prime Minister, and John Prescott, his deputy, have explicitly rejected Greenpeace's demand for a halt. Undaunted, Greenpeace intends to hand a petition to Downing Street next week for which more than 200,000 signatures have been collected so far, and it claims the

support of several dozen MPs. Conoco, owned by the huge US Du Pont chemical group, spent thousands of pounds flying a small group of London-based journalists up to Aberdeen and then to the Sovereign Explorer last Friday, to show them how seriously it took environmental concerns. But one thing the company refused to discuss was whether the rig had found any trace of oil. The 90 crew have been forbidden to comment for reasons of commercial confidentiality.

A lubricating mixture of chemicals and water known as drilling mud is constantly circulated down the hole as the drill bit screws into the earth. The mud comes back to the surface carrying rock cuttings which are then filtered out and dumped into the sea, along with some of the mud clinging

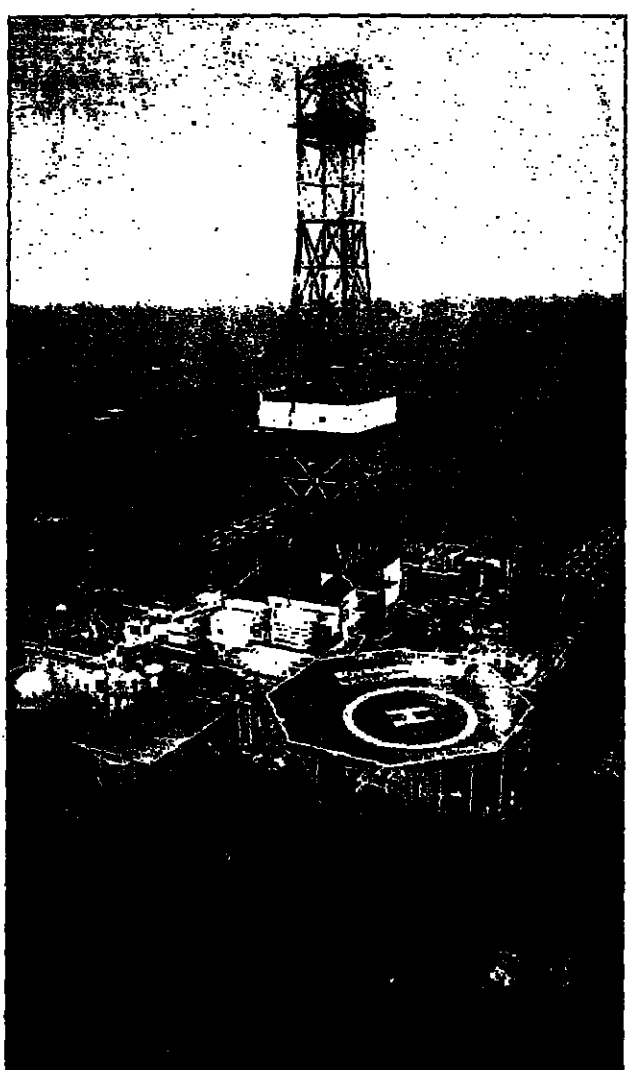
to them. These liquids used to contain toxic oils, but they are now water-based and far less harmful to life, says Conoco. Besides, by the time they reach the sea bed half a mile below they are very thinly dispersed.

Two vessels are constantly on station near the floating rig, one a support ship for emergencies and the other for any oil spillages. For much of the time, however, the sea is too choppy to put down floating booms to contain the oil which, in calm conditions could then be sucked up. The vessel carries chemical dispersants to break up any spill oil, but these would probably only be used for a big spill that had some chance of reaching the coast. For small spills, the best environmental option is thought to be letting them disperse naturally.

Conoco says it has searched for *Lophelia*, the deep, cold water coral found along the Atlantic frontier which Greenpeace says is at risk from oil exploitation, and on which it based its court case. So far, using side-scan sonar and remote-control submarines with cameras and bright lights, the company has found none of the coral around the Sovereign Explorer. But the television pictures reveal plenty of other life swimming and crawling along the muddy, sunless seabed, including a five-ft shark. Dolphins and pilot whales have been seen from the rig at the surface.

As for the dangers of extreme wind and wave, the rig has encountered two gales with wind of more than 70 mph since arriving on station in August. It heaved up and down 30 feet but stayed in place, thanks to eight 12-tonne anchors attached to one and a half miles of chain and cable.

Ian Blood, Conoco's UK head of exploration, accepts that the increasing use of oil and gas was likely to alter climate and that alternatives had to be developed. "They will take their place in the market eventually, 20 to 30 years out," he said. In the meantime, it was up to voters and politicians to decide if they wanted the very significant changes in lifestyles and abandoning fossil fuels involved, he said. "It's not for a company like us to tell the public what to do."



Digging deep: The Sovereign Explorer oil rig 100 miles north of the Outer Hebrides

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13/INTERVIEW



Not so much a party animal, more a party pooper

Martin Bell rents a little cottage in Great Budworth, a sweet, cobbled village in what is now his Cheshire constituency. The cottage is 300 years old with low, exposed beams. "Ouch!" he exclaims, as he bangs his head on our way in. This must be some little survival trick he picked up in Bosnia. He offers tea, but then retracts because he doesn't have any milk. Would I accept a gin instead? Not half, I reply. We had spent a good portion of the morning with the Friends of Handforth Station. People who are friends with stations, I now know, wear zippered-up anoraks with tightly laced-up hoods and don't mind rain and get excited about plans to renovate waiting rooms. A gin might perk me up nicely. It might even warm me up. Martin seems perfectly contented, though. The Friends of Handforth Station are "the salt of the earth, don't you think?"

He pours himself a whisky, then settles at the kitchen table to open his mail. First off, does he wish to partake in the annual Brain of Budworth Quiz? No, he thinks not. "Not my scene, really." Next, would he please sell the enclosed raffle tickets for some local good cause? No, he won't. "I just don't have the time. I'll buy them all instead." Then, will he jump on a plane to Iraq and do glamorous and brave things as whizzy bullets speed about? No, only joking. He doesn't get requests like that any more. The next is actually a request to open some forthcoming donkey derby. Martin will probably accept this invitation. He's already done one donkey derby and "it was so sweet it brought tears to my eyes". No, he doesn't think it'll be necessary to take along a satellite link.

He insists he doesn't miss his old life in the least. When he was asked to stand against Neil Hamilton he was pretty much ripe for the picking, he says, in that the BBC had probably had enough of him — "they didn't know what to do with me any more" — just as he'd had enough of them. He is much against the increasing " Murdochisation " of BBC News which means, he claims, everything must be geared towards commercial advantage. He is not impressed with the new 24-hour station. "It seems to me extraordinary that the BBC is celebrating 75 years with the biggest waste



DEBORAH
ROSS
TALKS TO
MARTIN BELL

of resources in those 75 years. What we need is less news, not more news." These days, he likes Terry Wogan and Radio 2.

Before he was approached he had never considered becoming a politician. Hadn't even voted for years. So what appealed to him? "The novelty, I suppose." The novelty? Surely if he'd been after novelty he could have just danced naked on the stage at the Windmill, which would have not only been novel, but also over with in one night instead of five years. "I'm not very good at dancing," he replies.

I suppose some people might argue there are no flies on Martin because he has bored them to death. Certainly, he is not very jokey and has a very big, solemn face. He would look good in a Strindberg play.

Anyway, mail dealt with, he humbers off. He has osteoarthritis of both hips — brought on, he thinks, by years of wearing BBC body armour — and walks slowly and painfully like some sad, old circus bear. A watery, tinkling sound comes from the next room. I assume he is watering the plants because that's why we've come here. "I must pop back to water my plants," he had said after Handforth Station. I wander after him, gin in hand. He is not watering the

plants. He is having a pee with the toilet door wide open. The thing about Martin Bell is that he really doesn't care who gets to see what. And I get to see quite a bit, as it happens. Actually, cancel out that Strindberg nonsense. He would go down rather well at the Windmill. He might even make a Chippendale, if only he could be encouraged to dance.

Yes, he is very open, which is what made him the perfect anti-sleaze candidate. He doesn't even seem to have any hidden depths. By this, I don't mean he is stupid. He isn't, by any means. He just seems relatively uncomplicated and, yes, good.

Last week, he met Neil Hamilton for the first time. They met at Martin's office in the House of Commons. Neil is now Martin's constituent. Neil wanted Martin's help in appealing against the damning verdict of the Commons Committee on Standards and Privileges. Martin has agreed. He will be raising a question about it today in the House. Martin could not turn him away. "He is my constituent, plus a very desperate and troubled man. He's been savaged by his enemies. He's been savaged by his friends..." But deservedly so, surely? "He did seem to have an expansive lifestyle, but perhaps Thatcher just threw up those sorts of people." Martin does not lead an expansive lifestyle. He rents this cottage, and still has a house in London, but that's about it. There is nothing in his bathroom apart from a green slab of something embossed with "Fairy" in the soap dish. I think it's the sort of soap you're meant to scrub shirt collars with, but Martin uses it on his face. No wonder he has quite a rough complexion.

Has he ever done anything he is ashamed of? Yes, he confesses. It was in 1983, when the BBC was very interested in minor royals, and there was a rumour about the father of some duchess having fought alongside the Germans in the war. Martin, then in Washington, was dispatched to Industry, Illinois, to talk to the duchess's sister. "I felt a real creep. The story was not in the public interest at all. I was just playing the good soldier." He found the sister, who was nursing a husband dying of cancer. He got the quotes and sent them back. "I prayed the satellite would fail, but it didn't." And that's

the worst thing you've ever done? "Yes."

Our day had actually started much earlier, at 9.30am, in the public library in the village of Handforth where Martin holds a surgery once every two months. He arrives with Pauline, his constituency manager. Pauline is a retired lady priest who wears a dog collar and carries a mobile phone. Martin, of course, turns up in one of his white suits. He has several, ranging from "pure white to off white". He started wearing them after he wore one once in a war zone and didn't get hurt.

The surgery goes on until noon. There's a nutter who complains the council are harassing him over the unkempt state of his garden. "It's upsetting my elderly mother,"

The thing about Martin Bell is that he really doesn't care who gets to see what. And I get to see quite a lot, as it happens

he says. "Oh, she lives with you, then," says Martin. "No, but it's still upsetting her." There's a CSA case, a father who claims he is paying too much towards the maintenance of his children. "I'm an expert when it comes to getting on with ex-wives," reassures Martin, who has two. Lastly, it's a woman worried about nuclear waste. "You've brought this problem to the right man! I was on Three Mile Island! I'm the most irradiated MP there is." He promises all his constituents that he will write to the relevant authorities. Afterwards, it's off to the station, so it really is just one thrill after another. How does he bear it? "It's all part of life's rich tapestry," he replies. "And I can really help people."

Certainly, he is beginning to find his feet. Last week, he attacked Labour in the House over the Formula One business, which he agrees is "shoddy" and "disappointing". The attack was good, he says, because it proves

once and for all "I am an independent, and not some Labour stooge". He has never met Tony Blair and although he was recently invited to a reception at Number 10, he couldn't go because "I had a prior engagement to speak at the Cheshire Ladies' 'Tangent Club'". Does he have any policies yet? "The wonderful thing about being an independent is that you don't have to have policies." How will he vote, say, when it comes to the ban on fox hunting? "I won't be voting for it. I'm a libertarian. I am here to defend people's liberties." Oh come on, I say. Surely democracy is as much about denying people liberties as awarding them. I mean, would you award people the liberty to attend public hangings? He accepts I have a point. Usually, I am not so clever. I must be the gin.

He was born in Suffolk, the grandson of Robert Bell, one-time news editor of *The Observer*, and son of Adrian Bell, farmer, author and compiler of the first ever *Times* Crossword. "He was a wonderful man. He was very clever, but very shy. He would spend hours in his study, groaning a lot. He had opinions about everything, and liked being known as the sage of Suffolk." His mother was a fine person, too. "She was very gentle, very lovely. Every-one adored her. The only time I ever saw her angry was when my father died. How dare he die and leave her alone? He had been her whole life. They were absolute best friends." When Martin appeared on *In The Psychiatrist's Chair*, Dr Anthony Clare tried to relate the serenity of his childhood to his later taste for war. Did he need to expose himself to danger to compensate for having had such an easy ride through his early years? Martin dismissed all this as "psychobabble" then as now.

He was dispatched to boarding school at eight because there were no good schools locally. His parents, who were not affluent by any means, had to make a lot of sacrifices to pay the fees. They never went on a holiday, as far as he can remember. "To pay them back, he worked very hard, and went on to get a double first in English at Cambridge. He rather regrets this double first now. "I should have spent more time having fun. I was always slaving away. There was footlights and ama-

teur dramatics and politics but I never did any of it." Girls? "Only in the most desultory way." When did he first lose his virginity? "I am not going to reveal that because I was very late, and I don't want to expose myself to contempt and ridicule." So he does have a secret. But I doubt there will be questions in the House about it.

He married a woman called Helen when he was 31, and had two daughters, Melissa and Catherine, who are both very beautiful. "Yes, aren't they?" Melissa, of course, packed in her job at Reuters to become Martin's PR manager during his campaign. "She offered her services after that business with Christine Hamilton on Knutsford Heath." He thought he had lost the election there and then. "I came across as a hopeless amateur, which I was. But I now realise the people of Tatton wanted a hopeless amateur, rather than a professional politician." He is a good father, I think. "My daughters are the best thing I ever did. I like having them around. I like their company."

This first marriage broke up after 10 years because he fell for an American TV reporter. "So, yes, my fault entirely." Guilt? Yes. "I can only put it down to the foolishness of youth." He married her but it lasted only four years. He currently has a lady friend and "has not ruled out" a third marriage.

Anyway, he's got to go and give a talk at some Royal Television Society do in Manchester. Can he give me a lift to the station? Yes please, I say, clambering into his Rover which is full of rubbish and gifts from constituents. No, not cash-stuffed envelopes, just books on the Cheshire countryside and big posters showing the scholastic achievements of various local schools. He doesn't think they need registering. Yes, he did once hear from Al Fayed. He called Martin when Martin announced he was standing. "He wanted to know if there was any way he could help me with my campaign. I told him he could help me by steering clear until after polling day." He drops me at the station. It is dark. "Thank you very much for a lovely night, Mr Martin Bell, MP." I say in my loudest voice. "Same time next week. Same rates?" He speeds off. Whoosh! A good man, but not very jokey, like I said.



DINAH
HALL

Women of my age start shoplifting undesirable things

"Just do your best — it's really not at all important. Well, apart from the £42,000 it will save us in school fees..."

No, this wasn't another BBC2 documentary about pushy parents, this was us, setting off for the first entrance exam of the season: the neighbouring borough's grammar school. To get in, according to local legend, our child has to come in the top 1 per cent. However, the fact that they only measure IQ in the form of reasoning tests is a good let out for parents like myself. "You see, they take no account of creative intelligence. Now if only they would interview him, or prefer-

ably us, we could tell them all about his completely untutored love of ancient history..."

At the gates children were cruelly ripped from their parents' arms and placed in marching lines by sporty Gauleiters. "Mum," called mine in plaintive tones as he was led away. I fought my way through to him, thinking he'd had a last minute attack of nerves or wanted to check out the difference between a rhomboid and a parallelogram, but no, his final request was that I look after his Tamagotchi. The other parents looked at me with undisguised disdain, but actually I think it a very good sign that he wasn't

looking all pale and anxious and that his nurturing instincts were still well to the fore. Anyway, I'm not at all sure about this school — the prospectus has a photograph of a group of boys in the playground peering earnestly over each other's shoulders at a textbook. It is clearly a school without a sense of humour. And that is why we shall not be sending our son there — it has absolutely nothing to do with him not getting in.

With two hours to kill, I decided to indulge in a bit of rest therapy, and went to test my fashion sense in Marks & Spencer. It was much more exciting when M&S stuff was

completely ghastly — it was then a real achievement to find something that was nice by mistake. Now about 20 per cent of their stock is really great. 60 per cent is almost there and the rest is for your mother in law. But it requires the nose of a Condé Nast fashion hound to distinguish between the really great and the almost there. If you find yourself hovering in front of racks of Alpine-style sweaters, desperately trying to remember whether snowflakes are new-nerd and communing with the signs above them — "yes, that really is Outstanding Value" — then you are in severe danger of getting it wrong. Or possibly going

through a middle-age crisis. In my case this was confirmed by finding two huge pairs of alien knickers in the bag with the school trousers that I had bought. This is what happens to women of my age — the slightest stress and they start shoplifting undesirable things like Royal Doulton figurines and size 18 knickers. Fortunately, I remembered seeing the knickers at the till — the assistant must have swept them into the bag with my legitimate purchases. That very same day a friend of mine walked all the way down London's Kings Road with a Marks & Spencer velvet body still on its hanger attached to her

coat. Nobody said anything to her, just in case it was a new fashion and commenting on it would make them look stupid. She was mortified of course ("It was a horrible colour, and the wrong size"), but it does make you wonder how much involuntary shoplifting goes on.

We've solved the Gulf crisis. My son briefly emerged from his teenage torpor the other day to ask if the UN sent weapons inspectors to America. Feel this sense of playground logic may have evaded Clinton and Blair in their effort to exhaust all diplomatic routes. A peerage will do nicely, thank you.

14/LEADER & LETTERS

The crisis that put a love affair on the skids



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Another modicum of innocence has been stripped away, as F Scott Fitzgerald once put it when describing the arguments that gradually destroy a love affair. Yes, Tony Blair apologised, but as lovers often apologise for not telling the whole truth earlier, and for not anticipating how his actions would be interpreted.

The question is, if he had known what a fuss there would be, what would he have done differently? Would he have insisted that the ban on tobacco sponsorship should apply to Formula One along with every other sport? He says not, although there has been a bit of squinting on this, and a hint of another policy S-bend. It is possible that the Government might seek to give motor racing 10 years to go smoke-free, rather than an open-ended exemption.

Would he have refused to meet Bernie Ecclestone, who had given Labour £1m, and the Prime Minister told *On The Record* yesterday, who had "made a firm

commitment to further donations"? No, he said. "It would have been bizarre if the bloke had been in a worse position as a result of donating to the Labour Party." No, it wouldn't. That is precisely what happens when you avoid giving the appearance of a conflict of interest. Douglas Hogg, for example, turned down a job as a Treasury minister because his wife was an economics journalist. Shouting the door of No 10 to Mr Ecclestone would have been no more bizarre than Labour being £1m worse off for having changed its policy in a way that suits the Formula One magnate. As the wags have pointed out, Mr Ecclestone got a real bargain: the U-turn he wanted and his money back.

Would the Prime Minister have sought the advice of Ethics Man, Sir Patrick Neill, any earlier? No, because that had been done "immediately". Let us not quibble: the letter to Sir Patrick went four days after the decision to exempt Formula One was taken, during which time Tessa Jowell was

being hung out to dry over her husband's motor-racing interests and press officers were allowed to deny knowledge of donations from Mr Ecclestone. The point is that Sir Patrick's predecessor, Lord Nolan, should have been consulted before the decision was taken. Mr Blair wrote to Frank Dobson, the Secretary of State for Health, the day after his meeting with Mr Ecclestone to ask for the special problems of Formula One to be considered. If he had handed back the money beforehand, the decision would have been seen to be impartial, although it would no doubt have been criticised on other grounds.

It is not simply the timing of the missive to Sir Patrick which was wrong, however, but its contents. Drafted by Jonathan Powell, the Prime Minister's chief of staff, and approved by Mr Blair himself, although signed by Tim Sawyer, Labour's general secretary, this is the "smoking letter" of the affair. It is a thoroughly evasive document. Mr Blair explained

yesterday that he did not tell the Commons about the possibility of a new donation from Mr Ecclestone because by the time the letter was sent "I was focused on the original donation" of £1m. On the contrary, the letter focuses on the "offer" of further money, in a doomed effort to steer Sir Patrick into letting the party keep the £1m while confirming its decision to turn down further donations.

Mr Blair's understanding of the concept of a conflict of interest is, in its moral smallness, shockingly like the arrogance of Conservative ministers over the years. Of course it is better that the Labour party discloses the names of people and organisations that give more than £5,000 up to 21 months after the event than not at all, which was the Conservative position. But none of what we know now was disclosed under these rules. It has been forced out of the participants in the same way that it might have been forced out of the previous government. And being forced to

hand the money back after the decision does not testify to moral probity.

No one doubts that Mr Blair thought he was making a decision in the national interest. His public apology even had a kind of chorus yesterday, in the form of Tony Banks, the sports minister, who spoke of "naivety" and the unthinkability of prime ministerial corruption. "The man's so squeaky clean it's awesome."

But what would Mr Blair have done differently, if he had been given the chance? He did not say. In his interview, his plea was that of the transgressor through the ages. Trust me, I know it looks bad, but I am not like those other men. "I hope that people know me well enough and realise the type of person I am, to realise I would never do anything to harm the country or anything improper. I never have."

This is the kind of plea that loses its currency over time, as each successive layer of innocence is stripped away, and the love affair loses its magic.

Post letters to Letters to the Editor and include a daytime telephone number. Fax 0171 293 2056; e-mail: letters@independent.co.uk. E-mail correspondents are asked to give a postal address. Letters may be edited for length and clarity.

LETTERS

Smoke of battle

Sir: With all the brouhaha surrounding tobacco sponsorship of Formula One, it is too easy to forget that what is important is whether or not tobacco sponsorship of sport does encourage people to smoke.

With me, it certainly did. Aged 10, 11 or 12, I was very keen to smoke, and only because I was obsessed by Formula One. The only brands I wanted to smoke were JPS and Marlboro. JPS because I was seduced by the glossy black Lotus cars with the gold logos, and Marlboro because in 1976 James Hunt, driving the red and white Marlboro McLaren, was the ultimate *Boy's Own* hero.

It was inevitable then, that when I first had the opportunity to smoke, which was when I went away to boarding school, I took to it like a duck to water, and only managed to stop ten years later.

PIERS TAYLOR
Oaksey, Wiltshire

Sir: If, as we are told, donations to political parties are never made in order to influence political decisions but are merely indicative of the donor's support for at least some of the recipient's policies, there seems to be a simple way out of the dilemma. The state should set up an independent body, through which, by law, all political donations would be channelled. The money would be passed to the recipient without any indication of its source.

MICHAEL GREEN
Birmingham

Sir: Does anybody make a donation, large or small, to a political party without self-interest? It may be hopes for higher pensions, better quality education or a more favourable business climate.

Would it not be refreshing to hear an admission from government that many decisions in life, especially political ones, are a matter of expediency and compromise? We have a brilliant industry in this country making the best racing cars in the world and there is the strongest case for protecting it - donations or no donations.

TOM KAREN
Lechworth, Hertfordshire

Sir: A limit on party campaign expenses is enforceable at con-



situency level, where the local agent is personally liable under law, but meaningless on a national basis.

Even given the most sophisticated accounting procedures (unlikely in Smith Square or Millbank), it would take months to produce audited accounts. If the victorious party were then found to be over the limit by an Ecclestone or two, would the election be null and void? Or would they pay the money back? Or would the runners-up be declared the winners?

TONY HAKEN
Wivenhoe, Essex

Sir: On the one hand the Government is reported to favour state funding for political parties. On the other, Gordon Brown announced that a £12m grant is to be sought from Europe to "educate" the British about the single currency. Any chance of William Hague and chums receiving a similar sum

to put forward their side of the argument? RICHARD DAVIS
London N11

Sir: Now Bernie Ecclestone has had his money back, can Labour voters have their manifesto commitment back, too? If the tobacco companies and their friends haven't paid for a favour, why should they receive it? N R BASSETT
London N19

Meanwhile, in the pub

Sir: The latest proposals from Action on Smoking and Health ("Smokers face American-style prohibition", 10 November) raise the question of what the effect of prohibition would be on British pubs and restaurants.

In 1996, the Campaign for Real Ale published details of a survey on this issue, carried out by the East Midlands

Brewing Association. This found that 53 per cent favoured the introduction of no-smoking areas, with the remainder against. Only 9 per cent supported a total ban - not so much a silent majority as a strident minority.

In Toronto, a US-style ban was partially relaxed because of a 30 per cent loss of business.

It is right to question the motivation of people who cannot or will not tolerate tobacco smoke and yet seek work in a pub. This is about as convincing a someone with acrophobia asking for a job as a steeplejack.

DAVID J ANDERSON
Wakefield, West Yorkshire

Epidemic

Sir: Is it me, or am I seeing the word "ubiquitous" everywhere these days? JOHN MITCHELL
Hertford

Power to the GPs

Sir: While the broad thrust of the proposed NHS reforms revealed in *The Independent* on 12 November is to be welcomed, they raise a number of concerns.

Reducing bureaucracy and abolishing the competitive ethos that forces hospitals to try in effect to put each other out of business can only be good. Transferring the power to set clinical priorities to those who most fully understand the problems is also good, but to give almost complete budgetary control to one section of the NHS - general practitioners - may produce new problems.

While GPs have perhaps the best overview of the local population's needs, nursing and allied health care staff and hospital doctors will have an equally valid perspective. To exclude all these others from spending decisions would risk recreating many of the antagonisms that

existed in the days when power to influence spending was seen to rest disproportionately with hospital consultants.

Moreover, GPs are the only individuals in the NHS who, in theory, can gain financial profit from the allocation of NHS funds to facilities in which they have a financial interest. If they are to have significant budgetary control of the NHS, consideration should be given to making them salaried employees, in line with everyone else.

DR ANDREW A JEFFREY
Roade, Northamptonshire

Sir: I applaud the Government's intention to move away from the NHS internal market and give budgets for hospital, primary and community care to GPs. However, in your leader of 12 November you are right to question whether GPs have the interest or managerial capacity to run the commissioning process. There are already recruit-

ment problems in general practice and there is doubt whether we will soon have enough GPs left on the front line treating patients. It seems folly to divert GP time into commissioning unless you increase the number of GPs. I am a front-line GP and I train new GPs. I suggest the Government starts by looking closely at the number of recruits to general practice and the management training they receive. ANITA CAMPBELL
Sheffield

Biblical beards

Sir: The Rev Peter Hatton suggests that Jesus may not have had a beard (letter, 13 November). Honesty compels me to remind him of the prophetic verse concerning Jesus in Isaiah 50:6: "I offered my back to those who beat me, my cheeks to those who pulled out my beard". NEIL JACOBSON
Wembley, Middlesex

Jury reform

Sir: Having just completed jury service, I agree with Valerie and Martin Hewitt (letter, 11 November) that the present system is unsatisfactory, but I would not agree that all jurors should be lay magistrates. I would prefer a combination of professionals and members of the public. This would have been beneficial.

A suggestion made by a member of our jury was that there should be a period of jurors' question time before retirement, when the jury could ask questions of judge and counsel.

One jury member felt she was too young to take the necessary decisions; perhaps there should be a lower age limit of 30. SANDRA BOUGHTON
Slidcup, Kent

Irish in Great War

Sir: Geraldine Burke (letter, 11 November) reports finding the monument at Ypres to the Irish who died in 1914-18. I remember many gravesites in Galway marked with the honours "Connaught Rangers and Old IRA". The paradox rests in the mass of "southern" Irishmen who fought in the Great War for, as their parliamentary leadership told them, "the rights of small nations" like Belgium and by implication Ireland.

Put this with the facts that there were more "southern" than "northern" battalions in the battle of the Somme, that Unionist shibboleth, and that in the Second World War there were more recruits from the Irish Free State than from Northern Ireland, and you may recognise why I do not wear a poppy.

Great numbers of Irish fought, in passing, for this country in 1914-18 but essentially for a freedom which was then denied them when they returned. M A MARTIN
London SW19

Croft options

Sir: Paul McCann ("The tabloid casting couch of Lara Croft", 12 November) suggests that if we have been "in a persistent vegetative state for a year" we shall not know who Lara Croft is. The opposite is the case. Only those who have been in such a state for a year will know. GEOFFREY BRACE
Exeter

Just right for Christmas (but don't expect the company to exist in January)



MILES KINGSTON

Christmas is nearly here, so it's time for the first of our regular Christmas Bazaar Advertising Supplements. The following items can be obtained from us, and we guarantee unconditionally that all of them are manufactured by people who want to make a quick killing this Xmas and then change the name of their company or do a midnight flit.

The Esther Rantzen Obscene Vegetable Seed Pack is a gloriously funny tribute to a woman who would be forgotten by now were it not for her pioneering work in breaking the taboo against showing suggestively shaped vegetables on prime-time TV. All the seeds in this lewd load are guaranteed to produce phallic parsnips, Rabelaisian radishes, tumescent tomatoes, or other rampant legumes! NB: the rare parsnip who is disturbed by suggestive green-

grocery can ring Vegwatch for counselling: the phone number comes with each packet. £40.99 for a jumbo pack.

Are you always losing the end of your sticky tape? Do you get out a roll of sticky tape and run your finger round one way, looking for the elusive end, then the other way, but always fail to detach anything that looks like the end? Which was so easy to find when you first started the roll... All your troubles are over with Small 'n' Sticky rolls of tape. Every time you want a bit of adhesive tape, you simply start a new roll - then throw it away! Each pack contains 100 rolls, and there's only 10 inches of tape on each roll. You need never look for the end of the tape again - just chuck it in the bin and start a new one! Only £79.99 a pack. Affordable and satisfying.

Many of us hanker for the old days when all matches were made in Bri-

tain, had Union flags on the front and a joke on the back. Recapture those days with a pack of Peel Off, Peel On, Sticky Back All-British Jokes! Simply peel a joke off the roll every time you buy a box of matches and stick it carefully to the back. £12 a roll.

The doll for the grown-up with the sense of humour: the Australian Barbie Doll! Don't forget that in Australia "barbie" means only one thing - a barbecue. That's right - Australian Barbie Doll is a hunky man with a bloodstained apron and smoke-smearred cheeks, holding a kangaroo steak on a butcher's fork! If you take his outdoor clothes off, you'll find that his chest is cruelly scarred and tattooed. That's because he used to be Kanga. The Interplanetary Killer, and we couldn't sell many of them so we have reclothed him as the Australian Barbie Doll! £29.99. (Does not come with fresh meat.)

The Angus Deayton Dictionary of TV Phrase and Gesture is the ideal gift for a young relative hoping to go into television, become a star presenter and be paid up to £1,000 a throw to open out-of-town wallpaper marts. It shows how you can get laughs by not saying anything but just turning and looking quizzically at the camera, raising one eyebrow, rolling your eyes demurely, etc. Contains a chart of hilarious phrases such as "No change there, then", "Allegedly", "Moving swiftly on", etc. £25.99.

It's always a problem to know where to put your grass cuttings, isn't it? Not any longer! If you are running out of space to put your cuttings, and can't cope with any more superfluous green masses masquerading as compost heaps, what you need is Lawn Briquette Maker. Simply

feed your grass cuttings into this powerful machine and it compacts each lawn-mower load into a briquette two inches square. These can either be tipped at dead of night into your neighbour's garden or used as building blocks for your children, or even to make a small garden shed. £280 for complete machine.

Ever felt nervous about sending a bottle of wine back in a restaurant or taking one back to a wine shop, because although it tastes foul you're not sure if it is corked or not? Miserable about facing the superior knowledge of the wine merchant? Worry no more! Armed with a Fungally Infected and Contaminated Cork nobody will contradict you. These corks (£12 a dozen) are all split and diseased, red-stained and revolting. Slip one out of your pocket and hand it to the waiter or wine merchant to-

gether with the bottle, saying: "Something a bit wrong here, I think."

If you're like us, you probably feel seriously under-endowed when you open your wallet to pay a bill in a shop or a restaurant and reveal that you only have one or two credit cards. Now is the time for you or your loved ones to walk proud with VIP Pack of Plastic! This is simply a stash of extra personal cards for you to put in your wallet, such as State of Texas Kidney Donor Card, the Bank of Eurodisney Long Loan Card, the Czech Touring Club Road Relay Card, the Reykjavik Casino Premier Gold Card, etc. They are all fake but they look as authentic as your own cards. Give someone a VIP present this year - Very Impressive Plastic! (from £35...)

Another Christmas Bazaar Supplement soon!

Dated? Dan desperately



THOMAS SUTCLIFFE
ON THE VIRTUES
OF IRRELEVANCE

Cut the feebl



GLEND A COOPER
ON SAYING
SORRY

15/COMMENT

Dated? Dan? Don't be so desperately dim



THOMAS
SUTCLIFFE
ON THE VIRTUES
OF IRRELEVANCE

I was dismayed to read the other day that Desperate Dan is to be retired after 60 years of appearances in *The Dandy*. It seems that this might be a tactical affair by the publisher, merely a calculated prelude to one of those "back by popular demand" resurrections once sufficient publicity has been whipped up. But even if it's too early to mourn the porcine-jawed toughie, there was still something depressing about the reason given. Desperate Dan was declared not to be "relevant" to today's young readers. This rather startlingly implied that there was a time at which he had been "relevant", in the specialised use of that term which might be roughly paraphrased as "responsive to our contemporary needs".

But were the children of 1957 really more likely to recognise elements of their own life in Cactusville than the children of 1997? It's possible that they would have been less disturbed by the notion of cow-pie - both because the fear that eating beef might turn you into a vegetable was still a long way in the future, and because they may have been more familiar with the fact that meat comes from animals (my wife recently heard a child of our acquaintance asking her mother what "chicken" was. "It's what you get when you peel a nugget, darling" was the answer). Perhaps today's children are unnerved by the horns that protrude from Aunt Aggie's Jacuzzi-sized pie dishes. But that doesn't seem enough on its own to account for Dan's slide into "irrelevance" - that gravest of contemporary crimes.

Of course, it would be relatively easy to put a case for Dan's continuing "relevance" to the childish imagination. You could talk about the way in which he represents the child's unappealing appetites or the child's dilemma of having more strength than control, which results in a trail of blameless destruction. But it feels a little dreary and priggish to advance such an argument. Quite apart from the fact that irrelevance should play a part in every child's life, to engage with the argument is to capitulate to the prejudice against the archaic which the whole notion of "relevance" enshrines. Because what is really meant when it is said that Dan is "no longer relevant" is that he wasn't born recently enough. He shares with other historic figures the almost insurmountable affliction of antiquity, a disability which can only grow worse as time passes. He may not be buried yet (can a cartoon figure actually die?) but in a way you could say that Desperate Dan has been admitted to the unenviable soci-

ety of Dead White European Males.

Writing about this epithet the critic Christopher Ricks pointed out the curiosity of despising a state which we will all, one day or other, come to share. "For some of us", he wrote, "the most brutal hatred within the acronym DWEM is not the racism of 'white' or the sexism of 'male' but the embittered provincialism which makes Dead a term of abuse." Homer? You pathetic stiff. Shakespeare? You're worm-food, mate.

Ricks is talking about temporal provincialism, of course - a form of yokelism that easily passes us by. Lounging in the undistinguished hamlet of *Now* (which we are convinced is the centre of the universe), we stare suspiciously down the rutted road that leads to Then, pitching stones at any unfamiliar face. Occasional travellers are allowed across the village boundaries but their papers will be scrutinised first. Only if their passports carry that all important stamp - STILL RELEVANT - will they be permitted to go on their way without molestation.

Curiously the visual arts don't seem to suffer from quite the same cultural bigotry as more discursive art-forms. It would sound distinctly odd, for example, to hear someone arguing that Giotto or Raphael were "still relevant" to a modern gallery goer, or that the Venus de Milo had "relevance" to modern anxieties. This may be because we have found a way to incorporate antiquity into paintings as a value rather than a disability - because they are individual, irreplaceable objects, their age only enhances their preciousness. We treasure their dogged persistence in their funny old ways rather than resenting it. And this fondness is further assisted by the fact that their communications do not require speech; they provoke interrogation but will not answer it. They keep themselves to themselves. Works which exist in print (and in language), on the other hand, have no such sentimental protection - they are treated almost as unpredictable relatives who have long outlived their welcome. They talk in funny ways that aren't always immediately understandable (don't they care anything about our rights as consumers?) Most scandalous of all - they

don't always seem to want to talk about us. Because what goes unsaid when the term "relevant" is used as an approbation are the words "me, me, me". Demanding that a classic work, or even a collection of historical facts, should demonstrate its "relevance" to our current lives before we will have anything to do with it is like agreeing to talk to someone only after you have made them promise that you will be the only subject of conversation. Not only is it stupidly narcissistic but it effectively guarantees that your provincial certainties will remain undisturbed.

Why not, for a change, celebrate the virtues of "irrelevance" - in particular the bracing effect of discovering that there are ways of living which bear no relation whatsoever to our own contemporary pieties or needs. The faintly hysterical search for "relevance" in the works of the past (and the present too) is more than the understandable desire to seek out continuities of human feeling; it is a scramble for another shard of mirror in which we can gaze, adoring and fascinated, at our own delightful features.



A fragment of evidence: shoes found at Auschwitz concentration camp in Poland

Germany and Russia must join this uncomfortable quest for the truth



LOUISE
JURY
THE NAZI GOLD
CONFERENCE

Every nation with a Nazi gold connection has been invited to next month's international conference on the issue. Probably more than 40 countries will be represented there. The Swiss have at last confirmed that they will be coming. But the most troubling sign in the run-up to this long-awaited event is that two of the most important affected nations - Germany and Russia - are still uncommitted to attending.

A flurry of meetings have taken place between embassy officials and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office to provide reassurances that the purpose is not to put them in the dock (though there will be some who think that is not an unreasonable place for them to be). The diplomacy is delicate.

Nazi gold is a subject which raises passionate emotions. The term has become shorthand for assets looted by the Nazis, most poignantly from Jews who they then killed in concentration camps. The Nazi gold affair has also embraced the question of the wealth which many Jewish families secreted away in bank accounts, no-

tably in Switzerland, where an inflexible adherence to its secretive banking laws prevented the accounts being reclaimed by survivors or their descendants when the war was over.

Many camp survivors are now elderly, and sorely in need of the money which was wrongly taken from them. Lord (Greville) Janner, chairman of the Holocaust Educational Trust, a lobbying group, has spoken emotionally on this. It was he who first suggested a conference as a way of speeding what recompense may still be possible for those in desperate want of it.

But, for once, even his language has been moderated. Lord Janner, like the Foreign Office, is conscious that some countries could be scared away if it looks as though demands may be made of them. He wants maximum attendance for a meeting on which much is being pinned.

The stated aims of the three-day gathering are: to pool available knowledge on the historical facts on gold looted by the Nazis from countries and individuals; to examine steps taken up until now to reimburse countries and compensate individual victims; and to examine the case for further compensation of individuals.

It is point three that is causing the problem. Inside Switzerland, there have been strong mutterings that its efforts so far - launching an investigation into the role of Swiss banks and setting up a historical commission and two different funds for those who suffered - have won it little credit in the outside world. The foreign minister, Flavio Cotti, appears determined to show contrition, but some Swiss remain suspicious that the conference will

provide another opportunity for critics to point a finger. Only after British reassurances that Switzerland will not be made a scapegoat has attendance been agreed.

Germany has noted the international criticism heaped upon Switzerland with concern. Senior German officials are understood to feel they have gone to great lengths already to make amends for their country's wartime activities and are worried that the conference will not acknowledge that. Russia, meanwhile, is simply adamant it will return no "spoils of war", whatever their origin. Earlier this year, its lower house of parliament, the Duma, overturned a seven-year-old agreement that spoils plundered by the Red Army at the end of the war should be returned to Germany. Millions of Russians suffered; what it seized in 1945 from the Germans was only reasonable recompense, they argued. That some of the goods seized from Germany were not Germany's in the first place is a point they wish to ignore.

Yet the conference could certainly benefit Switzerland and possibly Germany and Russia too. Although all three will undoubtedly come under the spotlight, the Jewish organisations who are attending are just as interested in countries whose role has not been publicly questioned hitherto.

It is believed that the banks of Liechtenstein, for instance, whose secrecy laws are no less inflexible than the Swiss, could shed light on the whereabouts of some assets if they chose to do so. Although the Vatican is sending a couple of priests, it is unwilling to bend rules that prevent the opening of its files for 100 years, even though those, too, might help in giving

clues to what was going on during the war years.

Yet without willingness and openness, attendance means little. Getting 150 delegates to Lancaster House is an achievement of sorts, particularly in the comparatively short time-scale of six months, but it must not be an end in itself. The Jewish community, to whom this conference means so much, has every right to expect that action will follow. This is the most promising opportunity yet to discover what happened to gold - and possibly other assets, such as paintings - whose whereabouts are unknown.

That is the problem with delicate diplomacy. There is a limit to how delicate you can be when the whole point of the conference is to raise difficult questions to which some may not want to provide answers. There are many countries, such as Portugal, Sweden, Turkey and Spain, where looted gold was traded by the Nazis to buy imports during the war. There are others, such as Argentina and Brazil, which were known Nazi boltholes. It is inevitable that confronting their involvement will prove uncomfortable.

Everyone knows that really. The logic of getting everyone

together is that the moral pressure for further action will be inescapable, which is, of course, why countries like Germany and Russia are dithering. But if ever an issue demanded the setting aside of self-interest, this must be it. All those who might be able to help must take part.

Robin Cook may not quite have realised the diplomatic minefield into which he was leading his officials when he agreed to host the conference, but it was undoubtedly an appropriate grand gesture from a Foreign Secretary espousing a new ethical foreign policy. The Government should not be shy of it and the delegates should do their utmost to settle the matter. Whatever assets remain must be identified and given back to the Jewish community while those who have suffered are still alive to benefit from them.

Some people have asked why Jews are pursuing their outstanding claims only now, more than half a century after the end of World War Two. The answer is simple: it had not seemed possible before. It does now. When Mr Cook opens the conference in three weeks' time, the opportunity must not be wasted.

Cut the feeble apologies, just get out the sackcloth and flay yourself



GLEND
COOPER
ON SAYING
SORRY

Who's sorry now? Well, yesterday it was that naughty Tony Blair, who came out and apologised for not owning up sooner to the £1m donation given by Formula One chief Bernie Ecclestone.

But then this year we've hardly been able to draw breath in between people stepping forward with yet another "mea culpa". Not since the Roman Catholic Church came up with

the confession wheeze have we seen so many people proclaiming themselves candidates for forgiveness.

There was Tony Blair himself apologising to the Irish for the potato famine, William Hague saying sorry for entering the ERM on behalf of the Tory party, the Americans regretting their treatment of Native Americans. Ditto the Australians to the Aborigines, New Zealanders to the Maoris. Forget compassion fatigue, "sorry" fatigue is the suffering of the moment.

In fact the year became more marked by those who did not apologise than those who did. Remember, no one has as yet put their head above the parapet to take responsibility for the Millennium Dome, the Spice Girls or Tamagotchis.

But saying sorry did not always sit so easily with the British character. The spoof history *1066 And All That* satirised traditional British feeling by castigating Edward the Confessor as a "Weak King" mainly because he was always "with difficulty prevented from confessing... crimes as he has

the habit of confessing everything whether he had done it or not."

But now that sorry is no longer the hardest word to say, and indeed for New Labour love means always having to say you're sorry, maybe there's some room for more confessions. William Wordsworth, who was yesterday accused of being a cruel bully to Coleridge, could express regrets to his fellow poet. Coleridge has also been owed a huge apology for years from the Man from Porlock who prevented him from writing more than the first few lines of *Kubla Khan* (the rest of us could breathe a sigh of relief). Henry VIII could apologise to - well where do we start - six wives, two lord chancellors, assorted sprigs of the nobility and an awful lot of monks for his bad behaviour. And as for the 20th century, well surely someone one day will get round to apologising for Michael Howard.

But is saying sorry ever enough? Yesterday Mr Blair conceded that the government should have not allowed the news to come out "in dribs and

drabs" and that they should have focused on it earlier. Essentially, then, it is not that the policy was wrong or whether the money should have been accepted in the first place but that Labour is sorry the crisis has not been handled well. One spokesman speaking to a Sunday newspaper summed it up: "We have done nothing wrong but we have behaved as if we had." In her book *You Just Don't Understand*, which dissects male and female nuances of conversation, Deborah Tanner, a professor of linguistics, points out that men often seem confused that women appear to apologise all the time. "Women frequently say 'I'm sorry' to express sympathy and concern, not apology," Professor Tanner says. "This confusion is rooted in the double meaning of the word sorry... 'I'm sorry' used figuratively to express regret could be interpreted as literally to mean 'I apologise'."

So it's not only the prime minister's haircut - or Blairstyle as it's now affectionately known - that's calculated to appeal to the elusive women voter. It's even the figurative use of apol-



'Sorry' was the hardest word for Henry VIII

ogising. But Tanner is wrong to see women as the only sex who differentiate between two levels of sorry. Any woman who has heard a man mumbling apologies for coming in late, or seeing an ex-girlfriend, or failing to ring when they should, will have heard the "I'm sorry you're upset" line (with the strong subtext "but I find it incomprehensible you are").

It's at times like this when you sigh over the limits of the English language - a dilemma

you don't suffer in Japan, where there are 50 ways to say you're sorry.

Much was made of the Japanese Premier's decision on the 1995 anniversary of VJ Day to use two particular words in expressing his deep remorse for the events of 50 years ago. For the first time Tomichi Murayama used the word "owabi", which is the most emotive and intense way to express regret and self-reproach, and in a television interview he also used the word "shazai" described as "a strong form of apology... which eliminates the ambiguities and shadings".

So what we want, Tony, is some sort of *owabi* or *shazai*. Your current apology just doesn't cut the silk. In our Oprah Winfrey world only full penitence will do. Let's have a ritual apology with a grand procession round Silverstone. As the starting flag is lowered, let's see you leading the spin-doctors flogging themselves with empty flag packets, and smearing their foreheads with the ends of Marlboro Lights. Perhaps it's time to create your own Ash Wednesday.

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A Christmas spree looks unlikely but next year could see a strong run

WEEK AHEAD



DEREK PAIN

A correction or the start of a long bear run? Since Footsie peaked early last month it has fallen 575 points; at one time it was down more than 900 points. So, as corrections go, the present setback is considerably more than the average decline, generally regarded as 12 per cent.

Although there is a deep well of opinion that shares will have a good run next year, even the more bullish strategists are uncertain about the remaining weeks of this year. Indeed the traditional Christmas spree, when shares enjoy a festive advance, does not appear to have been factored into many year-end calculations.

Allan Collins, at stockbroker Redmayne Bentley, believes the worst of the correction may be over but we have yet to see the end of it. The slump has resurrected

one of the less appreciated stock market wisdoms – buy in the autumn and sell in January or May. Behind this strategy is the theory that money is often tight in October and November because of tax demands. The tendency for crashes to occur in October is seen as lending support to this view.

If the remaining weeks of this year are the wipe-out many think – although I would not write off a heady sprinkling of Christmas cheer – there is strong underlying support for next year's more optimistic scenario.

Few of the usual bear market factors are in place. Cash levels are high, equities look cheap relative to gilts and interest rates, even if the new Monetary Policy Committee is trigger-happy, should be near

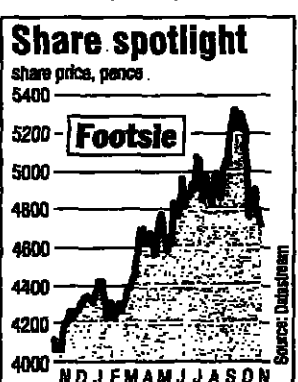
It will be interesting to see whether the arch-bears the

Gartmore, Mercury Asset Management and PDFM fund management groups, will be tempted into the market. After missing out on this year's run — Footsie started at 4,115.7 — they could decide more selective garnering is justified.

Significantly the fund management community, according to the Merrill Lynch monthly survey, has turned bullish. Merrill apparently found buyers outnumbering sellers by 10 per cent, the strongest equity-buying interest fund managers have displayed for more than two years.

Fund manager Brian Banks of Guildhall Investment Management is not at all downhearted. Footsie above 5,000 looked "a bit excessive". But he thinks the market is now fully supported: "I am not a seller; if you have decent shares you hold on to them."

Chartist Richard Lake at stockbroker Brewin Dolphin Bell Lawrie, is another who feels shares have peaked for the time being. He points to the Footsie distortions created by the new order-driven share dealing system. It has exacerbated the correction "and also suggests that any bear market is more likely to be over quickly than prolonged".



The respective behaviour of New York, which leads our market, and Britain's growing army of private investors represent imponderables.

Wall Street, by common consent, is overvalued. The US weight of money could keep it on the upward path; there are strategists who think a Dow Jones Average at 9,000 points is likely in the next few months. Others fret about a period of consolidation as events catch up with shares, or even a gradual decline as shares are adjusted to historically more realistic ratings.

In this country many private investors are still, despite recent falls, sitting on handsome profits. So far they have displayed remarkable poise, refusing to be panicked out of their investments. If their nerve holds, and I believe the growing sophistication of pri-

vate investors, even the Sid element, is not fully appreciated, the eroding trickle of small sales will not materialise. There is also the turmoil in

Far Eastern markets and the relentless decline in Japan. Although the knock-on effect should not be ignored it is easily over-estimated.

A wide array of companies are due to report this week, including some of Britain's renowned heavyweights.

The strength of sterling and reorganisation costs are set to devastate the interim profits of British Steel today.

Around £100m is expected against £262m last time. Year's results from the BOC chemicals group tomorrow will be dull, say £440m against £444.9m, but Vodafone should dial up a £310m half-year figure against £235.2m.

On Wednesday the Cour-

taunds chemical group could produce £57m against £64m for its six-months offering, and utility Hyder is likely to report interim profits of £110m from £101m.

Safeway, the supermarket chain is expected to check out with little changed interims of £230m and Thursday should see **Storehouse** on £38.3m (£37.5m).

Granada, still absorbing its Forte swallow, should show reasonable growth on Thursday with year's figures of £645m against £483.6m.

The generators are also in the frame. On Wednesday National Power will not light up the market with lower interim figures – say £245m against £251m. PowerGen, on the following day, will at least have the satisfaction of achieving a plus; around £150m at the halfway mark against £138m.

[illegible]

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FINANCIAL JOURNAL OF THE YEAR

London operations could suffer as plunging Nikkei threatens Japanese institutions

Japan's deepening financial crisis looks set to spread to London as Yamaichi, the country's fourth largest securities house, prepares to close its overseas operations, with the loss of 2,500 jobs. John Wilcock reports on fears that a triple weakening of Japanese stocks, bonds and currency this week could trigger a crisis in its overstretched banking system.

Yamaichi Securities will cut its staff by a third in just over two years, gradually withdrawing from its overseas operations and set up two subsidiaries under a holding company by April, the firm said yesterday, casting doubt over the future of its London operation.

No one in Yamaichi's London office was available for comment yesterday. It is unclear what, if anything, will happen to the London operation.

In Tokyo Yamaichi said that by April 2000 it will slash staff to 5,000 from 7,500. As the Nikkei fell last week, Yamaichi's share price dropped by nearly a fifth last Friday alone, and traded briefly below ¥100, two-and-a-half times less than its share price a month ago and a fraction of its ¥3,000 share price in the late 1980s.

This spurred rumours of a non-Japanese rescue bid for Yamaichi. Such rumours would previously have been laughed at by Japanese financiers but are now taken more seriously, as Japan's Ministry of Finance appears unwilling to launch a rescue operation itself.



Going down: People in Tokyo walk past an electronic board flashing the Nikkei stock average, down 206 points in Friday's morning session. The index ended at 15,082, down 344, after hitting a low of 14,966. Photograph: Reuters

The Nikkei 225 stock index plunged to its lowest since July 1995 on Friday, closing 344 points down at 15,082, on disappointment over economic stimulus measures from the ruling Liberal Democratic Party. At one point the index fell below the psychologically important 15,000 level.

The most serious immediate problem is that Japanese banks hold much of their capital reserves in the form of equity investments, the value of which have fallen rapidly in recent months. Further falls in the stock market will make them technically insolvent.

Japanese investors are bracing

themselves for another tough week. "Concern over a triple-weakening [of stocks, bonds and the yen] is very strong," said Soichi Okuda, senior economist at Nippon Credit Bank in Tokyo, yesterday. Larry Summers, US deputy Treasury Secretary, flew from Washington to Tokyo yesterday

for talks today with Japanese finance ministers in an effort to head off the growing crisis. Japanese banks hold huge amounts of US government bonds, and if they start selling those off to repair their battered balance sheets, America's own finances would be badly hit. Some observers think the

Americans may be willing to help construct a "lifeline" for the worst-hit Japanese banks, which would take over the \$900bn bad debts weighing down the commercial banking system.

For instance, eight leading Japanese banks are believed now to be below the minimum capital adequacy requirements of the Bank for International Settlements (BIS).

On Friday IBCA, the credit rating agency, issued a note titled "Thinking the unthinkable. A Japanese banking crisis? The need for a contingency plan." IBCA criticised the Japanese authorities for hoping for better times rather than planning for the worst. "In one way or another the Japanese banks have managed to lose almost \$700bn in eight years, a not entirely inconsequential sum."

IBCA added that if the Nikkei drops to 12,000, some trust banks would see their whole equity disappear.

In an attempt to make amends, the Japanese government will next Tuesday release its own package to revive the economy. Observers do not expect major surprises since it will be based on the Liberal Democratic Party's proposals.

The LDP's second stimulus package, following an initial plan last month, offered no income tax cut to boost consumer spending, nor any significant public works spending measures. The package included measures to improve the nation's infrastructure and telecommunications network and assist small companies.

"It's very questionable how much effect the proposals will have on economic growth," said Takeshi Naito, assistant general manager in the bond department at Daiwa Securities.

NatWest dismisses speculation of a merger with Barclays

Barclays and NatWest worked hard yesterday to counter rampant speculation that Barclays is seeking a merger between the two banks. Rumours that NatWest's chairman, Lord Alexander, and two other non-executive directors are likely to step down, were also denied, reports John Wilcock

Responding to suggestions that Barclays is putting pressure on NatWest to discuss a merger of the two high street banks, a Barclays spokeswoman said yesterday: "Barclays has noted recent press speculation about the linking of its name with NatWest. In common with all companies, Barclays continually monitors developments within its own industry."

The spokeswoman refused to comment on press reports that Barclays has retained Terry Eccles of JP Morgan, the corporate financier that advised Lloyds Bank on its takeover of TSB. Nor would she comment on reports that LEK, the management consultancy, has been retained to advise on the national interest arguments relating to a merger. "We have used both advisers in the past," she said.

Meanwhile a NatWest spokesman rebutted reports that two non-executives, Sir Desmond Fitcher, chairman of United Utilities, and Sir John Banham, former head of the Confederation of British Industry, are to leave as a result of a recruitment drive.

The spokeswoman said: "Since Lord MacLaurin (formerly of

Tesco) and John Melbourne (ex-NatWest) left, we have been actively searching for replacement non-execs. We have got Pen Kent, which leaves us one short."

He refused to comment on the idea that institutional shareholders want Lord Alexander to step down, following the U-turn on NatWest's former strategy of expanding its investment banking arm, NatWest Markets (NWM).

The spokeswoman also refused to be drawn on the heated competition to buy NWM's equities arm, which is being pursued by Deutsche Morgan Grenfell and Bankers Trust. "We did turn down a derisory approach from DMG. If someone comes along with an offer, it is our responsibility to consider it," he said.

As for a merger with Barclays, he said: "We've had no talks with Barclays or offers from Barclays. We're getting on with running our business."

"We're not sitting in some defensive bunker," he concluded.

Insiders at Barclays further point out that observers may be getting over-excited by the prospect of a big strategic initiative following last week's disposal of BZW's equities and investment banking operations to Credit Suisse First Boston.

In fact Barclays is keeping more parts of BZW in revenue terms than it is selling. If there are any changes in direction, they will be spurred by the need to prepare for European Monetary Union, insiders say.

Most observers in the City are bemused by the continuing rumours of merger intentions from Barclays, since such a link would run into massive competition objections from the authorities. The rumours are fuelled by the prospect of dazzling cost savings.

Care First battle set to escalate

The battle for control of Care First looked set to escalate this week, as speculation intensified that two venture capital companies were poised to throw their hats into the ring. But Leo Paterson finds Bupa is still confident of winning.

Bupa, the private medical insurer, hit back yesterday at weekend speculation that it could lose out in the battle to take over Care First, the UK nursing home operator.

A spokesperson for Bupa yesterday expressed confidence that Bupa would be able to win over shareholders. He said: "Bupa has made a full, fair and firm offer. As far as I know, it's the only offer that is on the table at the moment."

Care First, which last week recommended that its shareholders reject Bupa's £241m offer, is currently believed to be talking to two other parties.

Chai Patel, chief executive of Care First until just two months ago, is heading a consortium understood to be backed by BC Partners, the venture capitalist, and is expected formally to throw his hat into the ring this week. Warburg Pincus, the American venture capital firm,

is widely thought to be the other potential buyer.

But the two venture capitalists are not thought to have the financial clout of Bupa. Care First's debts total around £100m, meaning that a bidder wishing to match Bupa's offer would need to raise a total of £350m.

Some commentators believe that, if they were to raise the necessary cash, the two venture capitalists could become over-gear. One said: "The true sum that one would have to raise is £350m. You need to think what that does to these companies' interest cover."

Care First and Bupa had been in takeover talks for some weeks prior to last week's announcement by Care First that the Bupa offer failed to take account of current trading and Care First's "excellent prospects". At the same time, Care First said it had received expressions of interest from other parties and it would continue to pursue these to maximise shareholder value.

Mr Patel, who quit Care First in September following disagreements with Keith Bradshaw, Care First's chairman,

emerged as a potential counter-bidder last week, saying that he "would be unwise not to consider" reclaiming control of the nursing home group. Mr Patel still owns around 1 per cent of Care First's shares.

P&O/Stena link set for UK and European approval

After a year of waiting, P&O and Stena, the ferry companies, look set to get the green light for their proposed tie-up from both the UK and European competition authorities this week. A spokesperson for P&O said: "We have heard nothing officially, but all the indications are that there will be an announcement on Wednesday or Thursday."

However, the proposed joint venture, to be called P&O Stena Line, is expected to be allowed to proceed only if the two companies agree to certain conditions designed to alleviate competition authority concerns. The competition authorities are likely to impose caps on brochure prices, to require that P&O and Stena surrender ferry berths at Dover and to insist that the joint venture, which will control around 75 per cent of ferry crossings from Dover, is run separately from the companies' other operations.

A P&O spokesperson said yesterday that it would be premature to speculate about the conditions to be imposed, but admitted that the European authorities, in particular, had been concerned to ensure that the joint venture would be independently run.

'Interim managers needed'

Companies that fail to employ temporary or interim managers to fill management holes can run into long-term problems, according to a survey by Greythorn, the human resources company. Nearly two-thirds of companies surveyed admitted that long-term management absences led to over-worked key staff and disrupted productivity. One-sixth of respondents reported that management gaps generated resentment towards the organisation. Will Patching, Greythorn's managing director, said demand for interim managers was likely to grow in the years to come.

Pay rises for Royal staff

Staff at Royal & Sun Alliance, the UK's largest insurer, are set to secure pay rises of up to 10 per cent. Employees are to be balloted on the remuneration package, which includes more holidays and a performance-related pay system, but trade unions have recommended that staff accept the proposals. The ballot result is due on 23 December. The proposals will ensure that "all staff will get some sort of pay rise", according to Bifu, the banking union.

Low income groups face credit exclusion

The trend towards building society conversions could deny people in lower income groups access to conventional forms of credit, according to a survey out today. Lea Paterson finds pressure is growing for the Government to plug the gap.

A survey by the New Policy Institute (NPI), a left-of-centre think tank, argues that the rash of building society conversions could lead to "a crisis of financial exclusion". Nine million people, or one in five adults, do not have a bank or building society current account, according to the survey. The decision of many leading building societies to shed their mutual status could make matters worse, according to Dr Peter Kenway, co-founder and director of the NPI.

"Mutuals have historically been more sympathetic towards the smaller customer and towards those on lower incomes," explained a spokesperson yesterday. Demutualisation could lead to the building society service becoming "less personalised and more centralised", making it harder for those in low-

income groups to gain access to traditional financial services.

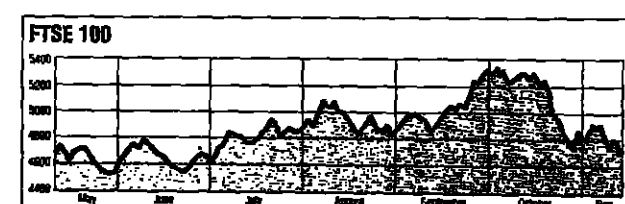
The NPI estimates that at least four million people are already denied access to conventional forms of credit because they score too low on the centralised credit scoring scales used by the big financial institutions.

"Some of these people may have perfectly healthy financial records," said the NPI spokesperson, "but are simply too far down on the income scale." People who are financially excluded in this way are forced to turn either to loan sharks or to specialist credit companies, which can charge as much as 300 per cent annual interest.

Last week's move by Helen Liddell, Economic Secretary to the Treasury, to make it harder for a small number of carpet-baggers to force building societies to abandon their mutual status was seen by the NPI as insufficient to plug the gap left by the recent conversions. The spokesperson said: "She [Helen Liddell] is trying to preserve diversity in the market, and that's good. But at best this move will maintain the status quo. More needs to be done."

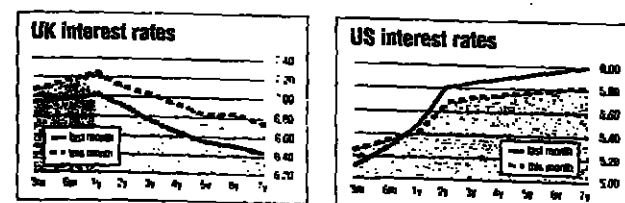
Last Thursday, Ms Liddell ruled that building societies could only vote to drop their mutual status and convert to banks at general meetings where at least 50 per cent of members were present.

STOCK MARKETS



Indices	Close	WT's chg	WT's chg %	52 wk high	52 wk low	Yield %
FTSE 100	4741.80	-22.50	-0.47	5367.3	3882.7	3.68
FTSE 250	4985.50	-52.00	-1.12	4983.8	4321.8	3.529
FTSE 350	2286.90	-13.00	-0.56	2570.5	1835.7	3.95
FTSE All Share	2251.24	-14.12	-0.62	2507.88	1835.35	3.824
FTSE SmallCap	2286.6	-21.30	-0.92	2407.4	2127.5	3.455
FTSE FTSE100	1252.3	-12.70	-1.00	1345.5	1136.7	2.425
FTSE AIM	985.7	-7.50	-0.76	1138	985.9	1.056
Dow Jones	7572.48	-110.76	-1.44	8299.03	6238.05	1.778
Nikkei	15082.52	-753.84	-4.76	21450.57	15083.22	1.022
Hang Seng	9957.33	-147.17	-1.46	16820.31	8775.88	4.023
Dax	3730.94	31.05	0.84	4459.89	2756.11	2.137

INTEREST RATES



Money Market Rates	3 month	6 month	1 year	2 yr	5 yr	10 yr	15 yr	30 yr	1 yr swap	5 yr swap	10 yr swap
UK	7.71	7.27	7.94	9.93	6.63	-0.91	6.54	-1.26			
US	5.88	5.88	6.00	6.29	5.85	-0.29	6.09	-0.37			
Japan	0.42	-0.08	0.46	-0.16	1.85	-0.91	2.44	-0.95			
Germany	3.76	0.58	4.13	0.83	5.57	-0.26	6.19	-0.53			

MAIN PRICE CHANGES

Rises	Price (p)	WT's chg	% chg	Falls	Price (p)	WT's chg	% chg
Platinum	235.5	9.5	14.88	Lorinol	88	-4	-14.85
Crude Energy	487.5	17	13.77	Pirelli and Sun	509	-15	-12.24
Brit Energy	401.5	6.5	10.3	Morgan Crucible	420.5	0.5	-11.19
Cable and Wire	512.5	16.5	10.22	Ionica Group	286.5	-6.5	-11.02

CURRENCIES



Pound	Price	WT's chg	% chg	Dollar	Price	WT's chg	% chg
Dollar	1.6920	+0.15c	1.6646	Sterling	0.5907	-0.05p	0.6007
D-Mark	2.9297	+1.40pt	2.5128	D-Mark	1.7301	+0.70pt	1.5095
Yen	212.30	+23.58	105.77	Yen	125.40	+22.00	111.10
£ Index	104.10	+0.80	97.90	£ Index	106.10	1.40	96.20

OTHER INDICATORS

Commodity	Price	WT's chg	% chg	Index	Chg	% chg	Next Day
Brent Oil (\$)	19.85	1.05	22.96	GDP	174.00	3.90	109.7
Gold (\$)	303.35	-6.90	-381.40	RPI	159.50	3.7	153.81
Silver (\$)	5.06	0.21	4.84	Base Rate	7.25		6.00

www.bloomberg.com source: Bloomberg

Smaller companies do not expect the strong pound to harm their export prospects

Small and medium sized companies do not think the strong pound will harm their export prospects, a new survey indicates. It coincides with a prediction that the Bank of England will have to raise interest rates more than its recent Inflation Report hinted because it is wrong to assume exports and growth will slow quickly.

The survey, by investment group 3i, found that small and medium sized companies are confident about their export prospects. According to 3i: "This

picture is consistent with the Bank of England's Inflation Report ... which noted that there had been little reduction in the volume of British exports since August 1996 despite sterling's appreciation of around 20 per cent."

Brian Larcombe, chief executive of 3i, said: "It is encouraging to see these businesses resilient in the face of a strong pound, though it is difficult to say at this stage whether we have yet seen the full impact of stronger sterling."

The judgment that the strong cur-

rency would now start to bite lay behind the Bank's prediction of a sharp slowdown in growth in the early part of next year. This forecast - published for the first time in the latest Inflation Report - allowed the Bank to predict a favourable outlook of inflation staying on target for the next two years.

However, a report published today by the investment bank Lehman Brothers says the Bank of England forecast is implausible. Economist Michael Dicks said the Bank's outlook

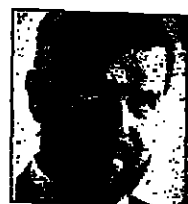
implied that the economy would slow from growing at a pace double its long-run potential to well under half its potential in the space of six months.

He predicts a much gentler slowdown, implying that for the next one or two quarters the economy will grow at a pace far faster than the Bank has assumed.

Mr Dicks said: "Unless growth does slow abruptly next year, the Bank will have to tighten the monetary stance, perhaps appreciably. Otherwise

it will miss its inflation target." Interest rates would climb to 8 per cent in the summer from their current level of 7.25 per cent, he predicted, with the next increase occurring as early as January or February 1998.

The 3i survey lends some support to the argument that growth will not slow that sharply. The survey found that significantly more companies expected to increase rather than decrease the value of their exports over the coming 12 months.



GAVYN DAVIES
ON THE
THREATS
TO GLOBAL
GROWTH

US consumers keep the world out of recession

Freddie Couples, a laid-back genius of an American golfer, recently played an important tournament in Japan. Leaving the 18th green, he was asked by a local reporter whether he enjoyed playing golf in Asia. "Asia?" said a puzzled Freddie. "I have never been there."

Sadly for the Japanese, Freddie's view of their geographical location is not shared by more orthodox scholars. Quite clearly, the chronic long-term problems of the Japanese economy are being made much worse by its close proximity to the Asian meltdown. The key question now is whether the Asians will suck the rest of the world into recession with them.

A previous column in this series argued that the emerging market and Japanese domestic shocks might reduce GDP in the developed economies by about 0.6 per cent next year, and might reduce global GDP by about twice that amount. These are significant numbers, and are much higher than the rather complacent estimate of 0.2-0.3 per cent of GDP published last week by the OECD. But these Asian shocks need to be set against the context of a strong US consumer, with surging investment activity in America, and tentative signs of life in domestic demand in continental Europe.

One figure is telling in this regard: US domestic demand on its own accounts for 28 per cent of global GDP, whereas the combined GDP of Asia (ex Japan) and Latin America accounts for only 16 per cent. California alone is about the size of China and India combined. (All these figures are estimated at actual exchange rates. At exchange rates which more correctly reflected purchasing power parity, the emerging

economies would appear larger than these figures imply, since several important currencies, including the Chinese yuan, are severely undervalued according to official statistical sources.)

The world may be moving into an era where the emerging economies are becoming increasingly important, but we should not go prematurely overboard on this. The motor for world growth is still located primarily in a handful of developed economies, though to a smaller extent than a decade ago. For example, if projections for domestic demand in the US and the EU are raised by 1 per cent next year, while the entire GDP of Latin America and Asia (ex Japan) is reduced by 3 per cent, then world GDP would be exactly unchanged.

In the past few months, this is broadly the pattern of the revisions to forecasts which has taken place. For example, since the onset of the Asian crisis in the summer, the Goldman Sachs forecast for domestic demand in the US next year has been revised up by about 1.2 per cent, while GDP in the Asian economies (ex China, India and Japan) has been revised down by 3.5 per cent, and Latin America has been revised down by 1.3 per cent. In addition, domestic demand in Japan has been revised down by a phenomenal 4.2 per cent. Consequently, weaker growth throughout the emerging economies and Japan has been partly offset by stronger domestic demand in the US.

Overall, the combined ef-

fect of these three revisions has been to reduce the level of OECD real GDP next year by only 0.3 per cent compared to Goldman Sachs' July projections, and to reduce world GDP by only 0.6 per cent.

However, while there should be no recession next year, the shocks which have hit the global economy in the past few months have genuinely increased the risks in the system, since it is increasingly apparent that domestic demand in the US remains too strong, while domestic demand in much of the rest of the world remains too weak. In the short term, the benign way out of this dilemma would be for the dollar's trade-weighted index to rise, simultaneously reducing inflation pressures inside the US and redistributing global demand to the areas that need it most (ie Asia and Europe). By holding down US inflation pressures, this might prevent a tightening in US monetary policy that would otherwise spell the end of the equity bull market.

The problem is that this benign process can only continue for as long as the strong

dollar does not lead to excessive imbalances in the current account positions of the major economies. So far, this has not happened. Although there have been signs of a widening trade imbalance between the US and Japan, this has been more than offset by capital outflows from Japan, so the dollar has been trading at its 1997 highs against the yen. Furthermore, though the dollar has adjusted downwards against the European currencies, it has simultaneously moved sharply higher against emerging currencies, so the trade-weighted index for the US currency has also been trading at recent highs.

But trade imbalances between the US, Japan and the EU now look set to rise quite rapidly in coming quarters. It is possible that the threat of this will bring down the dollar quite quickly, in which case the dilemma facing Alan Greenspan's Federal Reserve will markedly worsen - they will either have to watch US inflation rise or tighten US monetary policy in an environment of great financial market turbulence.

That will spell trouble for global markets.

Perhaps more likely, the dollar's trade-weighted index will continue firm for a while as emerging currencies and (possibly) the yen fall further against the US unit. On this scenario, the Fed may stay on the sidelines for a few more months, while they assess the damage done to the US economy from the emerging market shock. Growth in global GDP would probably stay close to trend, while global inflation

would remain around its "optimal" 2 per cent rate. Things would then look quite good for a time.

But beneath the surface, trouble may be brewing. It would hardly be a new event if a rising exchange rate temporarily suppressed domestic inflation pressures, but later led to trade imbalances which triggered instability. A firm dollar/weak yen scenario, which may seem beneficial to markets in the near term, would probably carry the seeds of its own eventual destruction. In that it would lead to a dangerous widening in trade imbalances and - much later - to a collapse in the dollar. This dollar collapse would then unleash pent-up American inflation pressures which have been suppressed so far by the strong currency. All this would obviously increase the risk of a hard landing in 12-24 months time.

In summary, the series of different shocks and "news" in recent weeks have weakened activity in Japan, Asia and Latin America; strengthened domestic activity in the US; and increased the risks of wage pressures emanating from a tight US labour market. Taken together, these three factors are most unlikely to lead to global recession, but have clearly increased the scale of global trade imbalances, and made the task of the Fed much more complicated.

Those who see a stronger dollar as a benign way out of this problem may well be proved right for a while, but this would only exacerbate trade problems later, and raise the spectre of an eventual hard landing for the US economy. It is premature to fear that this extreme outcome will happen soon, but it has certainly been brought a few steps closer by the events of the past few weeks.

Global domestic demand and GDP forecasts

	Goldman Sachs Forecast in July	Goldman Sachs Forecast now	Change in level
Domestic demand			
US	4.2	2.8	+1.2
Japan	1.3	2.0	-0.7
EU	2.0	2.7	-0.7
GDP			
ASEAN	5.3	6.7	-1.4
NIES	5.5	5.9	-0.4
Latin America	4.5	5.0	-0.5
OECD	2.8	2.7	+0.1
World	3.8	3.8	0.0

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